Art in America

International Review Since 1913

Wellness Today

ARTISTS TURNED THERAPISTS

–

CLIMATE & DISABILITY JUSTICE

–

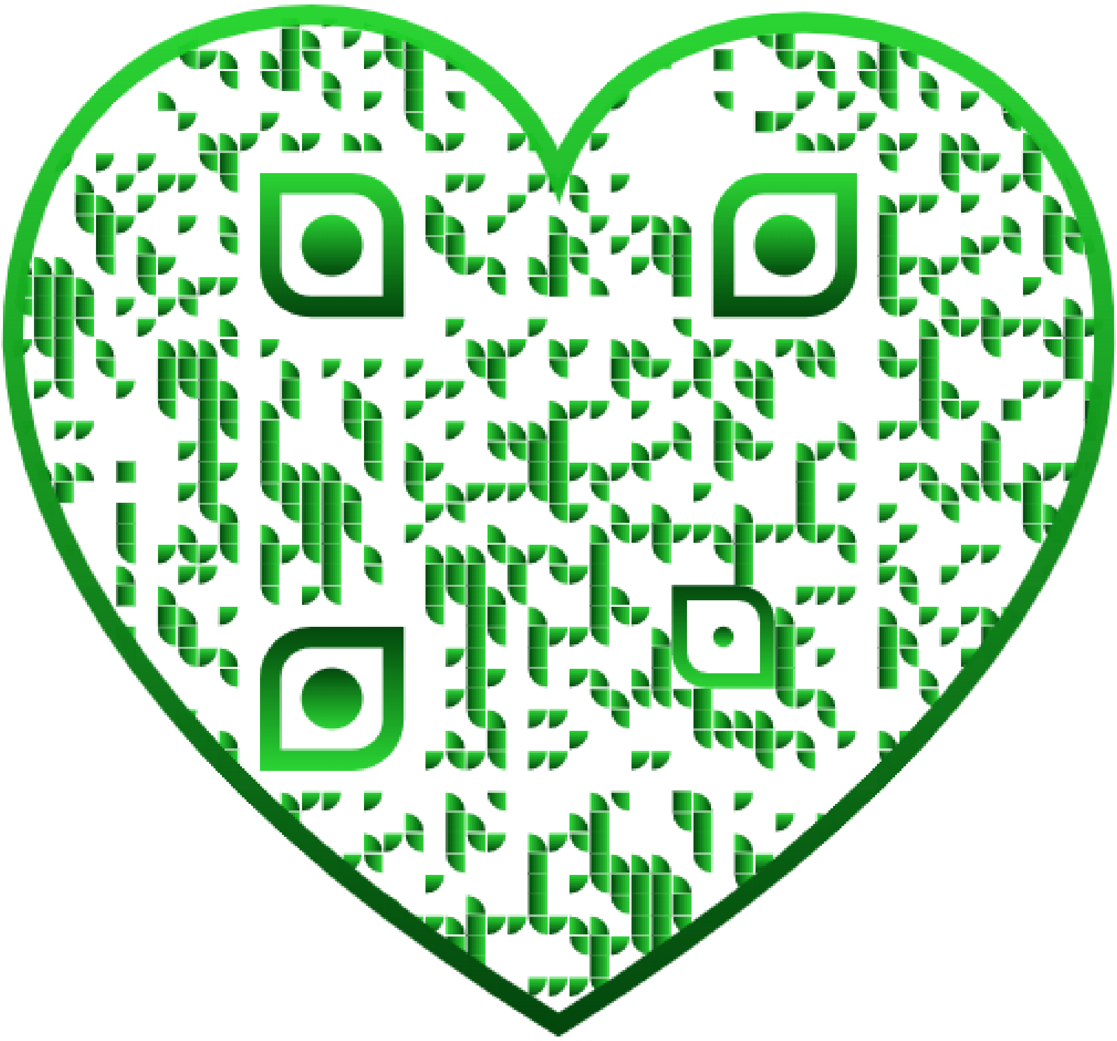
SICK WOMAN THEORY

+

MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ'S "LONGEVITY METHOD"

SPRING 2025

COVER ARTIST: JANA EULER



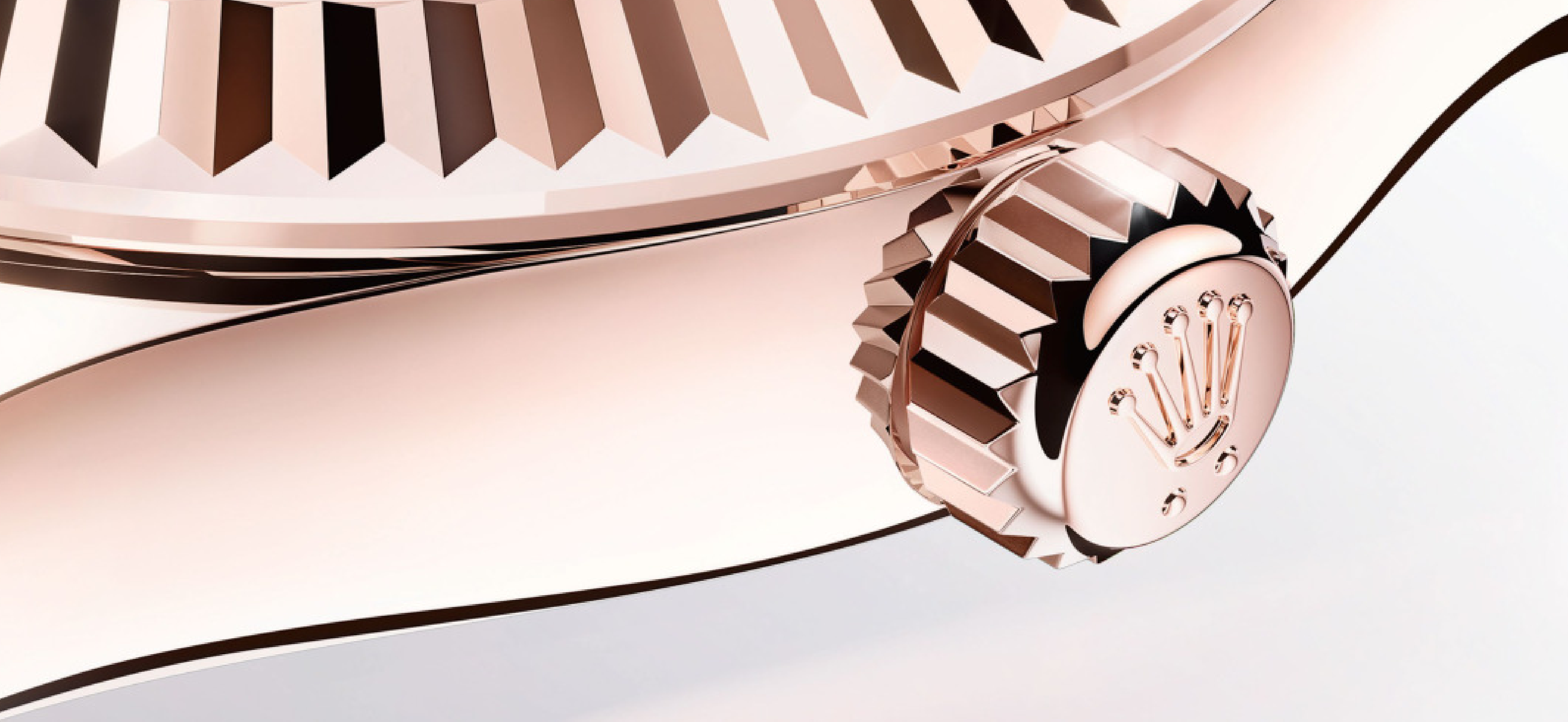


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Photo Adam Davies

HAUSER & WIRTH

CAMILLE HENROT

A NUMBER OF THINGS

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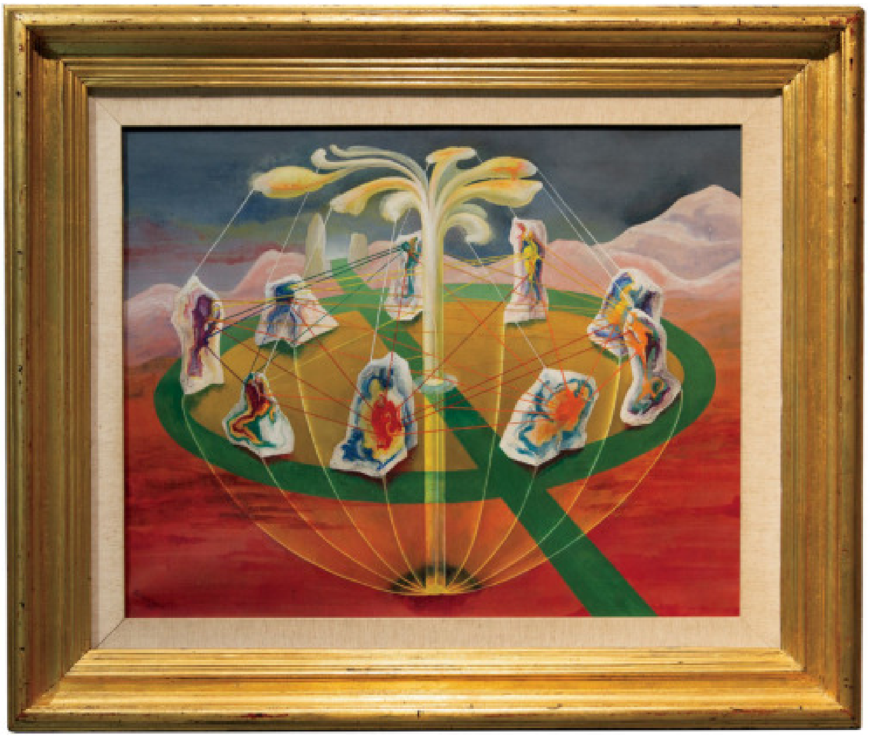

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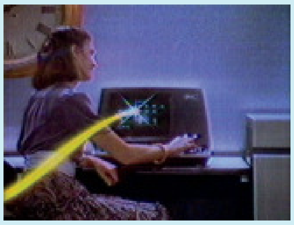

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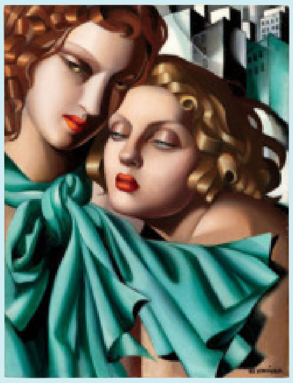
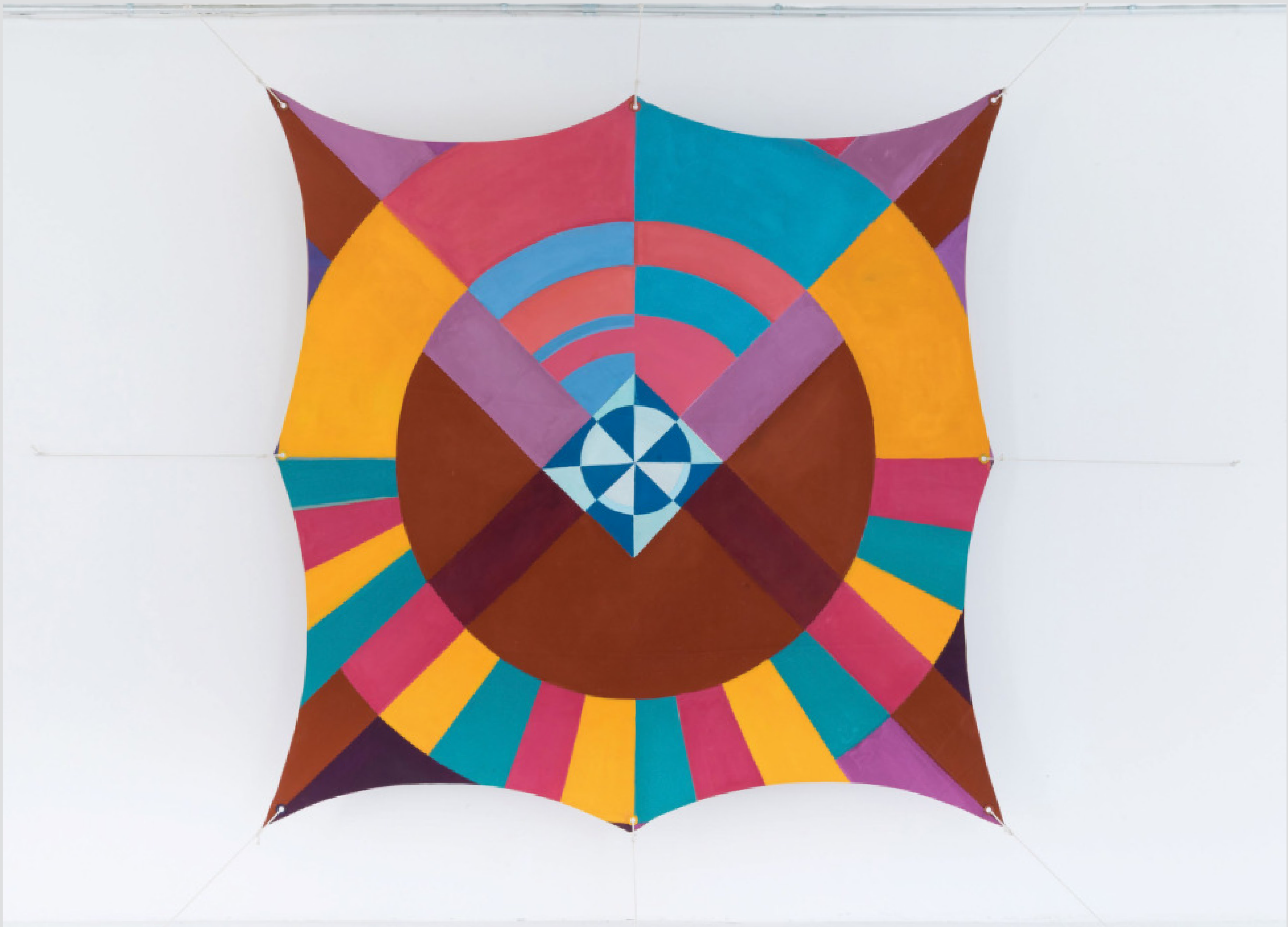


Tamara de Lempicka: *The Girls*, 1930.

Colquhoun: ©Spire Healthcare/©Noise Abatement Society/©Samaritans; Birnbaum: ©Dara Birnbaum/Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York; Lempicka: Courtesy Artis–Naples, The Baker Museum/Photo RoseBudz Productions/©Tamara de Lempicka Estate, LLC/ADAGP, Paris/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The Menil Collection

Houston, Texas



Featured in *Joe Overstreet: Taking Flight*, on view January 24–July 13, 2025, at the Menil Collection, Houston, is Joe Overstreet's *HooDoo Mandala*, 1970. Acrylic on canvas with metal grommets and cotton rope, 90 × 89 ½ in. (228.6 × 227.3 cm). Neil Lane Collection. © Estate of Joe Overstreet/Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Jenny Gorman

Tacita Dean: Blind Folly
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Vol. 113, No 1. *Art in America* is published 4 times a year by Art Media, LLC, 475 Fifth Avenue, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10017. Tel: (212) 398-1690.

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ISSN: 0004-3214. The opinions expressed, apart from the editor's comments, are those of the writers themselves and not necessarily those of the publisher. Not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts or photographs. *Art in America* is indexed in the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature and the Art Index. Articles are abstracted and indexed in BHA (available online through Dialog and Questel) and in Historical Abstracts and/or America: History and Life. Back volumes of *Art in America* are available on microfiche from Bell & Howell. Att. Periodical Department, Old Mansfield Road, Wooster, OH 44691. Microfilm copies are available through Xerox University Microfilm, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY and at additional mailing offices. SUBSCRIPTIONS: For new subscriptions in the US – 4 issues $79.95. In Canada, $119.95 per year (includes GST); foreign, $159.95 per year, payable in advance in US currency. Single/back issues: Call 800-925-8059 (515-243-3273 outside the US) for pricing and availability. FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE and to order a new subscription: ONLINE www.artnews.com/customerservice. Write *Art in America,* PO Box 37943 Boone IA, 50037-0943, or CALL 212-764-6690 (515-243-3273 outside the US). POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Art in America,* PO Box 37943, Boone IA 50037-0943 and allow six weeks for change.

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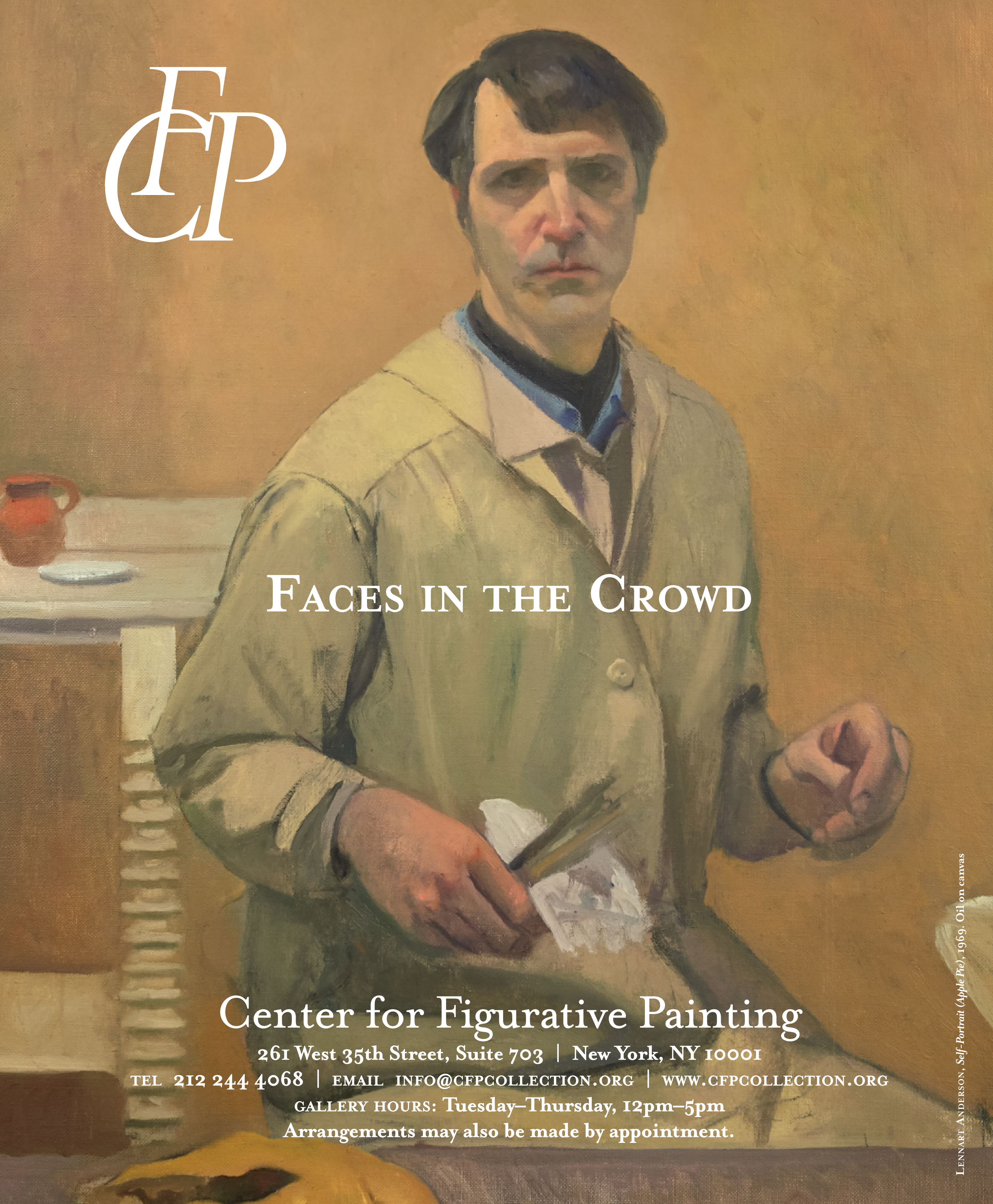

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LENNART ANDERSON, *Self-Portrait (Apple Pie)*, 1969. Oil on canvas

Well Then…

First, a word of caution: Wellness, as we use the term in this issue, does not mean the lotions, potions, and crystals of the Goop world. Instead, it points to the means by which artists are engaging with ideas about how we humans attend to the health of our bodies and minds in an age when the world around us has all but ensured our disability. As we completed these pages, wildfire raged in Los Angeles, lacing the air with toxins, and stresses abounded all across a globe enmeshed in violence and decay of countless varieties.

Jenny Odell, in her 2019 book, *How to Do Nothing*, points to the words of Audre Lorde, who in the 1980s said that "caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." Community preservation can also be an act of political warfare, as *Art in America* senior editor Emily Watlington explores in her essay on climate change and disability, writing about such matters as LaToya Ruby Frazier's efforts to restore clean water to Flint, Michigan. Artists like Frazier and Sunaura Taylor are at the forefront of addressing what Taylor calls our "Age of Disability."

Putting aside the threats of climate change and environmental degradation, art and self-care have much in common. Take it from an artist who became a therapist. In an article on several such artists in this issue, painter and ceramicist Max Maslansky observes that "art-making is self-care … [I]ts practice can bring you in better contact with yourself. Art is a healing dialectic with the self." In a darker vein is Emily McDermott's profile of Johanna Hedva, whose work incorporates hooks, chains, and hourglasses dripping with thick black goo, and addresses care and healing in the face of deterioration and death.

Then again, perhaps the world of Goop is not so far away after all: In these pages, Marisa Meltzer looks at the longevity practices of Marina Abramović, who, with her workshops and serums, may well be giving Gwyneth Paltrow a run for her money.

ZANELE MUHOLI

Feb. 24–July 6, 2025

Zanele Muholi, *Phila I, Parktown*, 2016, edition of 8 + 2 artist's proofs. Courtesy of Southern Guild and Yancey Richardson. © Zanele Muholi.

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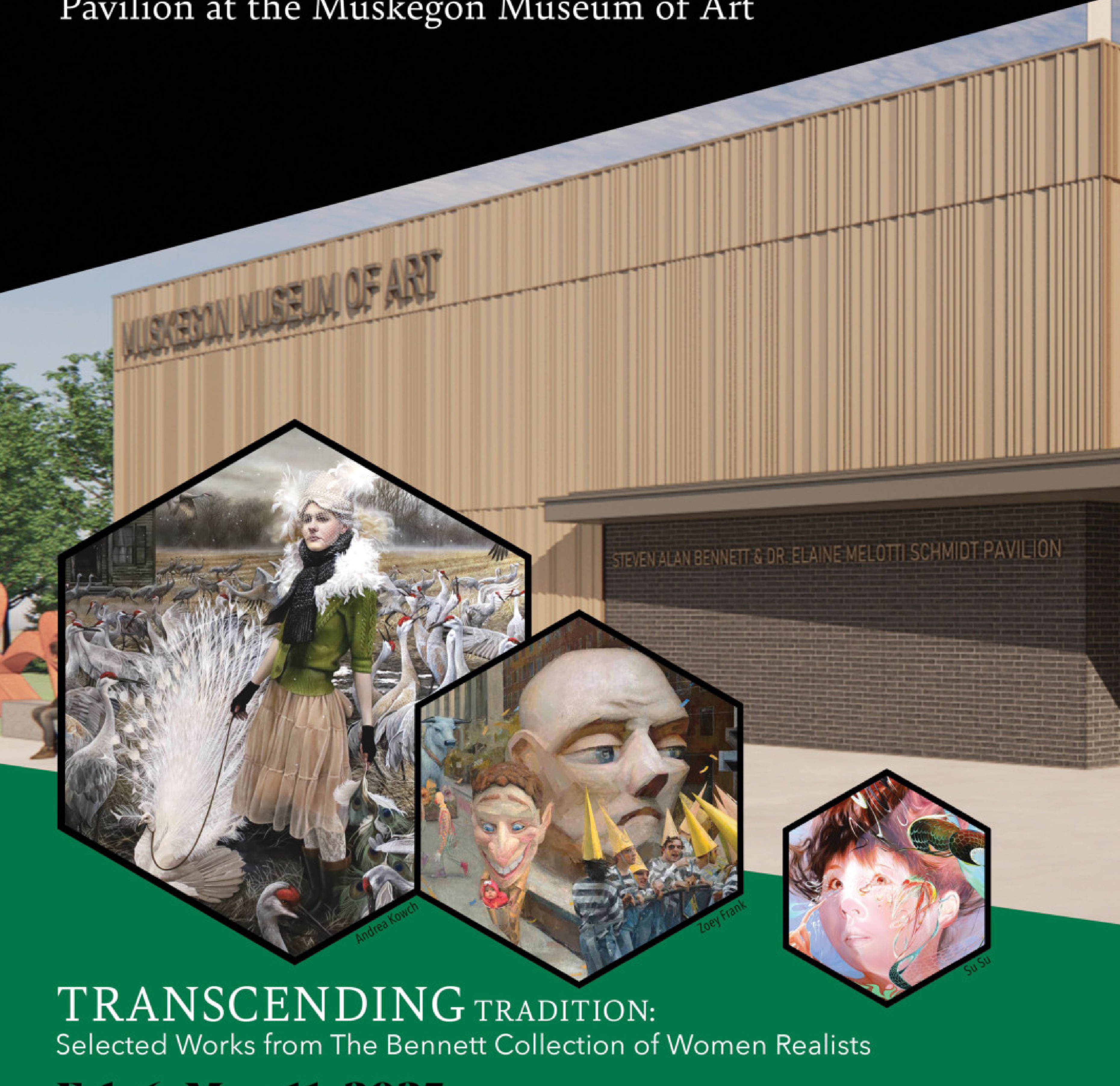
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Eliza Goodpasture

In these pages, Eliza Goodpasture profiles British Surrealist painter Ithell Colquhoun. Goodpasture is a writer, editor, curator, and art historian whose writing has appeared in such publications as the *Guardian, Financial Times, ArtReview,* and *Frieze*. She is a research affiliate at the University of York, where she recently completed her doctorate. She has previously held positions at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Frick Collection, the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, and the York Museums Trust. Her research has been supported by the Paul Mellon Centre for British Art, the University of York, and the Association for Art History. She is currently working on an exhibition project on British artist Ethel Sands.

Aliza Shvarts

Aliza Shvarts is an artist and writer who takes a queer and feminist approach to reproductive labor and language, a perspective that factors into her essay on reproductive justice in these pages. Shvarts's artwork has been exhibited at venues including Tate Modern, the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, and the Leslie-Lohman Museum. Her writing and interviews have appeared in *October*, the *Cut*, and *Art Journal*. She is currently director of the Low-Residency MFA Program and assistant professor of performance at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Ara H. Merjian

Ara H. Merjian is an art historian and Italian Studies professor at New York University. Merjian is the author and editor of several books, including *Futurism: A Very Short Introduction* (2025). He translated a novel on the Armenian Genocide by Maria Àngels Anglada and is coeditor of the anthology *Surrealism and Anti-Fascism* (2024). With Alessandro Giammei, he coedited *Heretical Aesthetics: Pasolini on Painting* (2023); he is finishing a new volume on Pasolini. Merjian is a past recipient of an Andy Warhol Foundation/Creative Capital Writers Grant and a Meiss/Mellon Author's Book Award of the College Art Association. He has written for CNN.com, *Modernism/Modernity*, and the *Paris Review*. In these pages, Merjian reviews an exhibition on Orphism.

Carolina A. Miranda

Carolina A. Miranda reviews an exhibition on photorealism for this issue. Miranda is an independent Los Angeles–based culture writer covering such topics as art, design, performance, books, and digital life. Until 2024, she was a columnist at the *Los Angeles Times* and previously, a freelance journalist. She has written for the *Atlantic*, *Time*, *ARTnews*, and the *New York Review of Books*. She was a winner of the 2017 Rabkin Prize in Visual Arts Journalism. She served as founding cochair of the L.A. Times Guild, the company's first newsroom union.

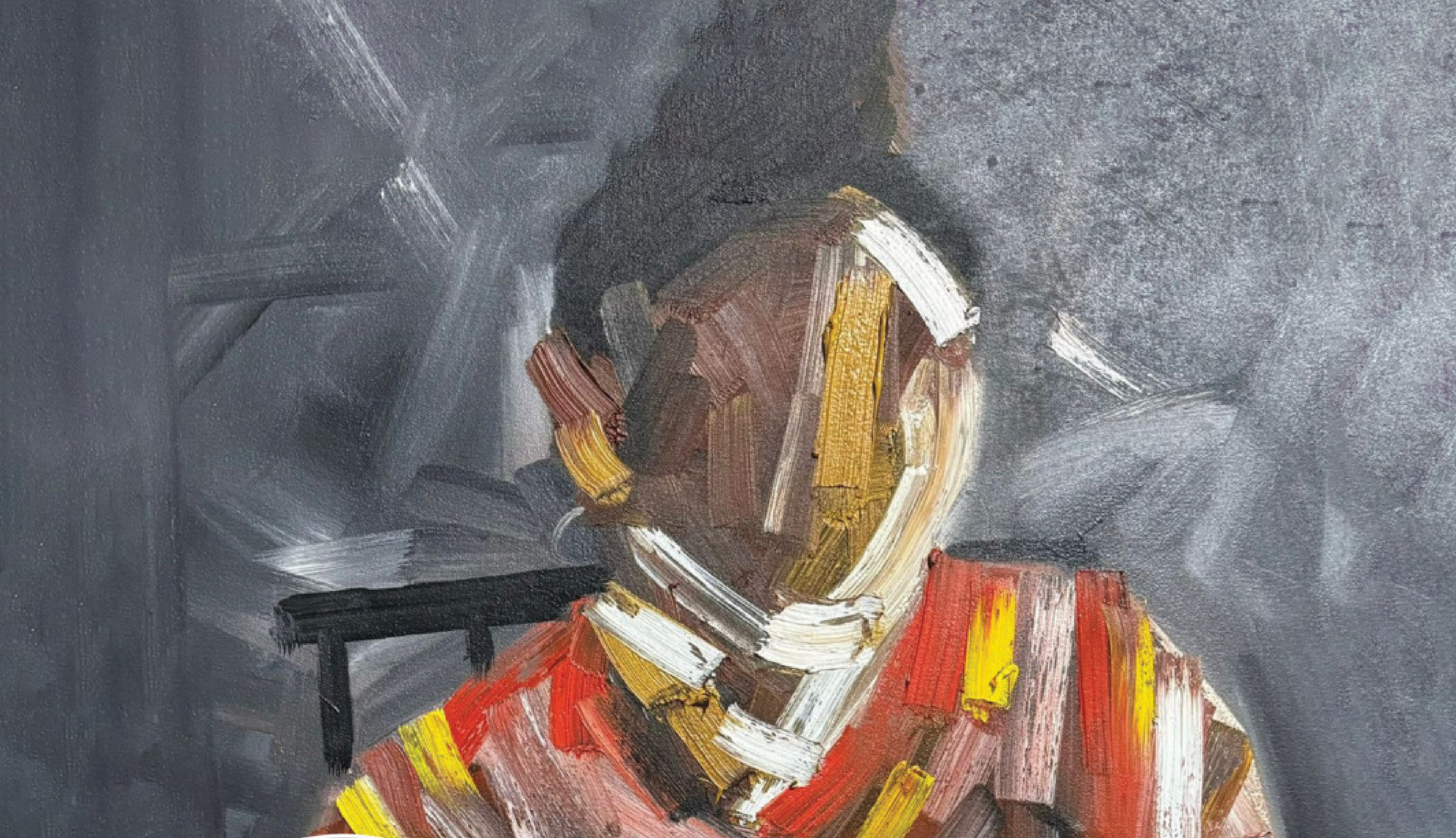
Nicole Kaack

Nicole Kaack is an independent writer, editor, and curator with a background in performance production and archival work. Her writing has been published in *Artforum*, *BOMB*, and the *Brooklyn Rail*. She has organized exhibitions and programs at the Kitchen, Hunter College, and A.I.R. Gallery. Previous roles include editorial program manager at the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art, associate director at A.I.R. Gallery, curatorial fellow at the Kitchen, and archival fellow at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Kaack edits and produces, with Mira Dayal, the collaborative artist publication *prompt:*. For this issue, she interviewed feminist artist Harmony Hammond.

Marisa Meltzer

New York–based freelance writer Marisa Meltzer appears in this issue with a story about Marina Abramović's recent wellness program. Meltzer has contributed to such publications as the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, *New York Magazine*, and *Vogue*. Her 2023 book *Glossy: Ambition, Beauty, and the Inside Story of Emily Weiss's Glossier* was a *New York Times* bestseller and *Financial Times* best book of the year. Meltzer also teaches restorative yoga classes at Sky Ting in Manhattan.

Illustrations by Denise Nestor



MOSES SALIHOU

@moses_salihou

PORTRAITURE MEETS ABSTRACTION

Moses Salihou a Cameroonian artist based in Toronto. He explores the ideas of belonging and existence by creating work that blends elements of portraiture and abstraction.

Salihou's thick application of paint creates a textural intensity that mirrors our own internal complexities. Central to Salihou's work is his belief that human beings are composites of various identities, experiences, beliefs, and emotions. Salihou's gestural application leaves the defining features on the faces of his portraits only loosely representational.

The portraits become composites of various people rather than fixed and stable identities, allowing the observer to be a participant rather than just a viewer. These rich surface effects provide Salihou's work with a sense of dynamism that captures the fluidity and movement he ascribes to the concepts of identity and personhood. Salihou has exhibited across the United States and Canada. His work is also in private collections globally, including in Europe, New Zealand, Africa, Asia, Canada and the US.

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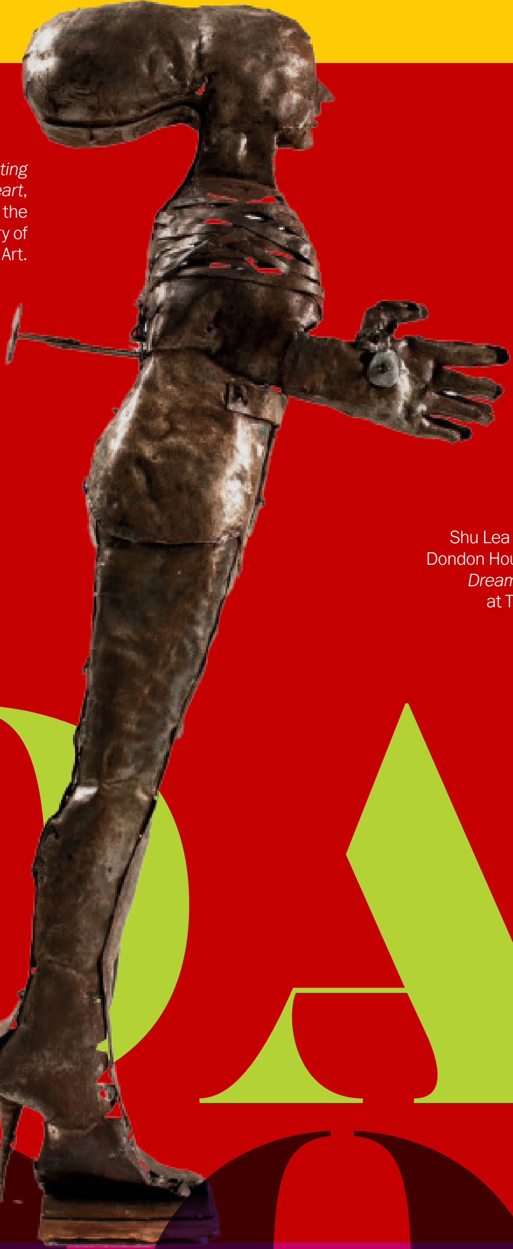
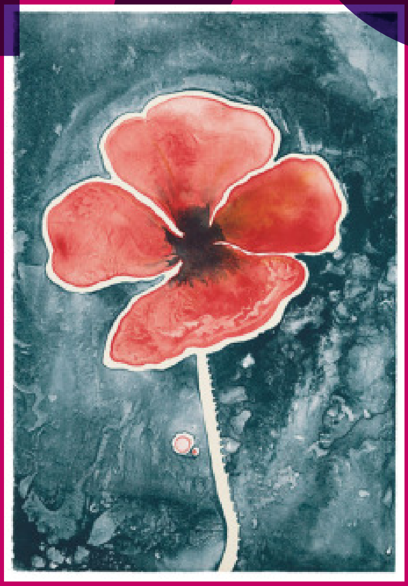


June Leaf: *Shooting from the Heart*, 1980; at the Addison Gallery of American Art.

Shu Lea Cheang and Dondon Hounwn: *Hagay Dreaming*, 2023–; at Tate Modern.

DATE BOOK

A highly discerning list of things to experience over the next three months.

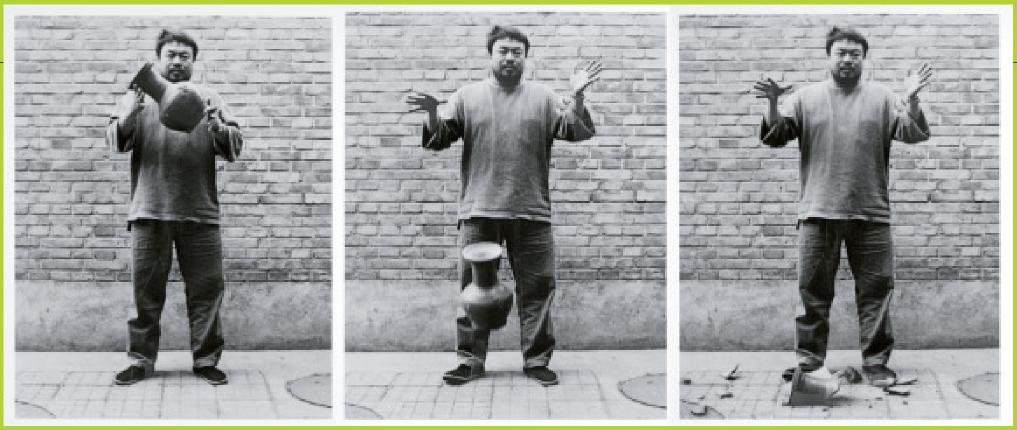


Ruth Asawa: *Poppy*, 1965; at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Ai Weiwei: *Neolithic Vase with Coca-Cola Logo*, 2015; at the Seattle Art Museum.

Leaf: Photo Frank Graham; Cheang and Hounwn: Photo Hsuan Lang Lin; Weiwei: Courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio/©Ai Weiwei; Asawa: Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/ ©Ruth Asawa Lanier, Inc./©Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Anne Imhof, 2024.



Ai Weiwei: *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, 1995.

“Ai, Rebel: The Art and Activism of Ai Weiwei”

Seattle Art Museum

Ai Weiwei is famous for attention-grabbing works that involve breaking ancient Chinese vases, critiquing xenophobia in Europe, and giving tourist sites the middle finger. He is less famous for the art made early in his career, during the 1980s and ’90s, when he took his cues from Marcel Duchamp and presented funky readymades that spoke to paranoia during the AIDS crisis. One goal of this retrospective is to shed light on these formative works, which suggest a subtler, less provocative touch than what this Chinese-born artist is known for.

Mar. 12–Sept. 7

Doom

Park Avenue Armory

The stately and enormous drill hall of New York’s Park Avenue Armory will host the largest-yet performance event by Anne Imhof, who won the Golden Lion for her bracing work *Faust* in the German Pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale. That piece was a sort of black-metal dance with S&M airs, and this one—curated by Klaus Biesenbach—comes with only cryptic descriptive hints and the promise of serving as “a seismographic meter of our times, while projecting into our own possible futures to find a new form of hope.”

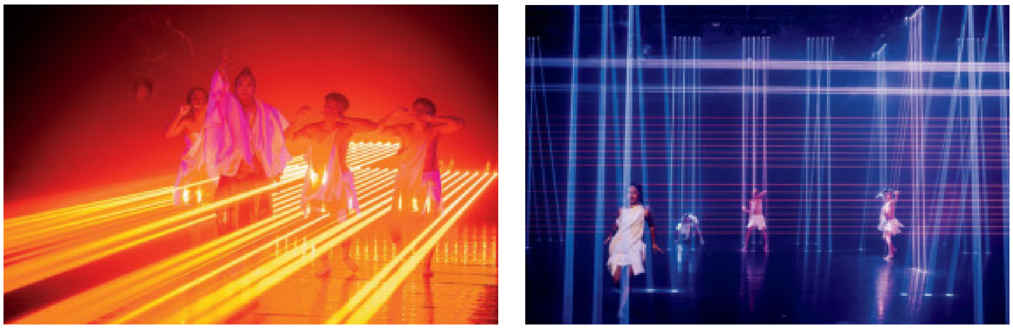
Mar. 3–12

Hagay Dreaming

Tate Modern

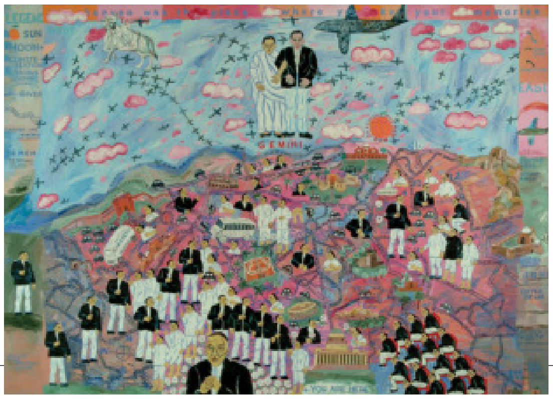
Legions of digital art enthusiasts love Shu Lea Cheang for art that exists only on the internet, where she has created pieces about a bowling alley in Minnesota, the killing of Brandon Teena, and various other topics. Her latest project, a performance in London called *Hagay Dreaming* that is being staged in collaboration with Dondon Hounwn, may seem like a departure—as its only use of technology comes in the form of lasers that dancers will move around. Still, *Hagay Dreaming* continues Cheang’s interest in queerness, the focus here on nonbinary beings known as Hagay. These beings are derived from the lore of Taiwan’s Truku people, an Indigenous group to which Dondon acts as a shaman.

Mar. 13–15



Shu Lea Cheang and Dondon Hounwn: *Hagay Dreaming*, 2023–.

Arpita Singh:
My Lollipop City: Gemini Rising,
2005.



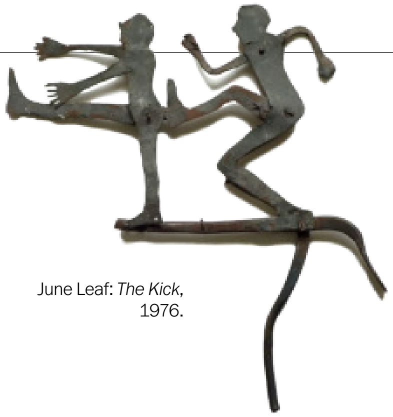
Arpita Singh

Serpentine Galleries

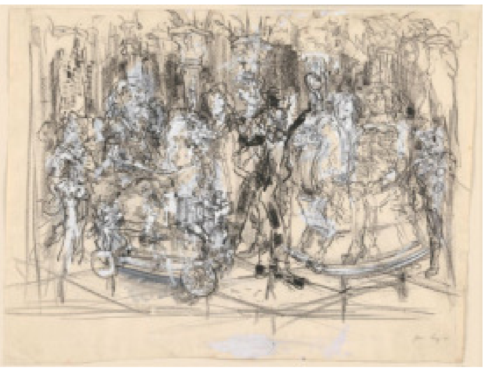
In her 1997 painting *The Eternal Repose*, Arpita Singh pictures a saggy, multiarmed female figure who reaches out toward other women—one in the nude, another in a blue dress, and yet another with her arm behind that of her male companion. Singh here suggests that women in her home country of India must maintain a delicate balance between many different identities, a topic that has fascinated her since she began working in the ’60s. With Singh’s international profile on the rise, she will get her first-ever retrospective outside India, with a show in London that will place a spotlight on how she injected a feminist undercurrent into traditional modes, including miniature painting.

Mar. 20–July 27

Imhof: Photo Nadine Fraczkowski/©Anne Imhof; Weiwei: Courtesy Ai Weiwei Studio/©Ai Weiwei; Cheang and Hounwn: Photo Hsuan Lang Lin; Singh: ©Arpita Singh



June Leaf: *The Kick*, 1976.



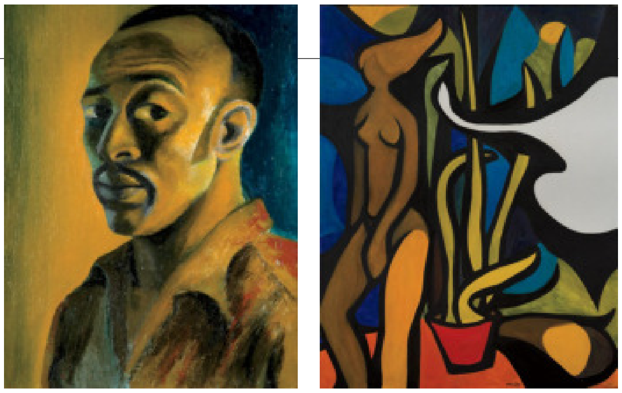
June Leaf: *Study for Ballroom with Hobby Horses*, 1963.

"June Leaf: Shooting from the Heart"

Addison Gallery of Art

June Leaf once stated that she wanted to "make people from the inside out" – and she continued to do so, in off-kilter and beguiling ways, up until her death in 2024. Whether in the form of sculptures that leapt into motion at the touch of a trigger or spare drawings of her husband, the photographer Robert Frank, Leaf sought strange and new ways of revising figuration for an era dominated by abstraction. Her first retrospective in decades – debuting in Andover, Massachusetts, and traveling next to NYU's Grey Art Gallery – surveys 75 years' worth of unclassifiable work.

Mar. 15–July 31



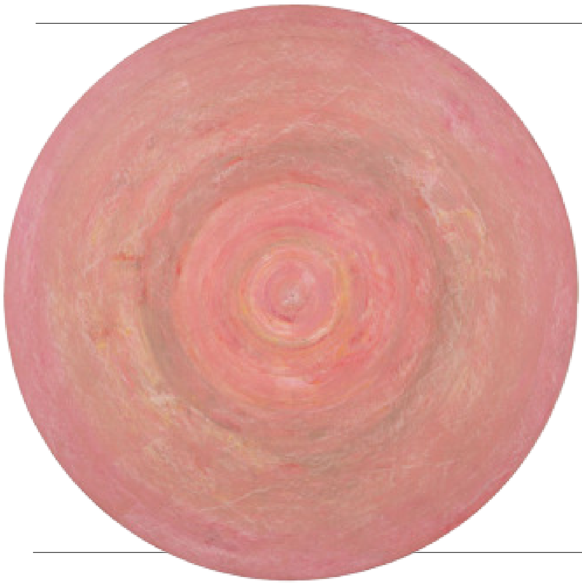
Gérard Sékoto: *Self-portrait*, 1947 (left), and Roland Dorcély: *Leda and the Swan*, 1958 (right).

"Paris Noir"

Centre Pompidou

Bookended by the formation of two legendary French journals focused on African cultural production (*Présence Africaine* and *Revue noire*), this ambitious survey examines the font of creativity that poured out of African émigrés who lived in Paris between 1950 and 2000. The work of some 150 artists will stand in for this history, which has gone largely overlooked by French institutions, many of which are now engaged in the process of remedying the erasure.

Mar. 19–June 30



"Jack Whitten: The Messenger"

Museum of Modern Art

Jack Whitten's ways with abstraction evolved over the course of a storied career in New York. During the 1960s, he worked more or less conventionally, painting with oil on canvas. But his practice deepened as he embraced process-oriented techniques that involved squeegeeing paint, creating images from dried acrylic chips, and more. This show – touted as the first comprehensive retrospective of Whitten, who died in 2018 – assembles more than 175 works and will spotlight some of his lesser-known experiments, including black-and-white works from the artist's residency at the Xerox Corporation in 1974.

Mar. 23–Aug. 2

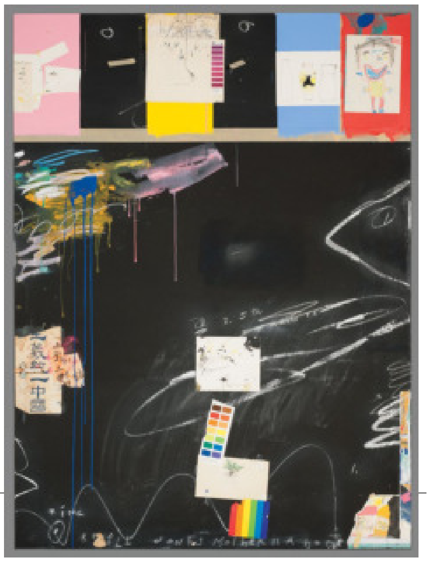
Jack Whitten: *Four Wheel Drive*, 1970.

"Raymond Saunders: Flowers from a Black Garden"

Carnegie Museum of Art

Painter Raymond Saunders takes the notion of the blackboard as his canvas, literally and figuratively. In his 1967 essay "Black Is a Color," he mused about the shade he often uses as a background for abstract works as a hue as well as a condition: "It is high time that the black artist make his own rejection of misguided, inadequate—if not out-and-out dishonest—interpreters of his conditions," Saunders wrote. "Can't we get clear of these degrading limitations, and recognize the wider reality of art, where color is the means and not the end?" In Pittsburgh, where Saunders was born and raised, the 90-year-old artist will be the subject of a survey including some 35 works from a long and mindful career.

Mar. 22–July 13



Raymond Saunders: *Layers of Being*, 1985.

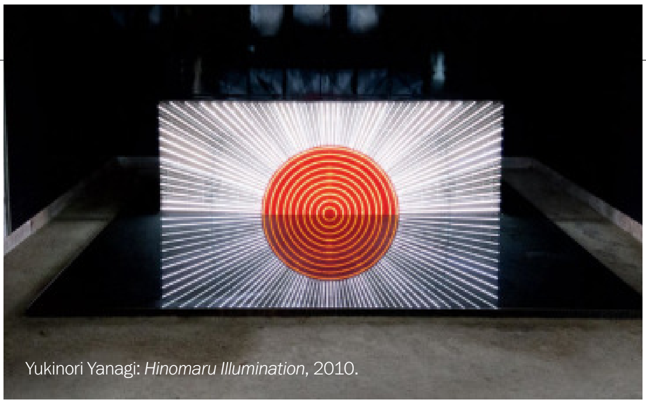
Leaf, from top: Courtesy Andrew and Ann Dintenfass Collection; ©Museum of Modern Art, New York; Sékoto: ©ADAGP, Paris; Dorcély: Photo Fabrice Gousset/Courtesy Loeve&Co, Paris; Whitten: Courtesy Hauser & Wirth, New York/©Jack Whitten Estate; Saunders: ©Estate of Raymond Saunders

Yukinori Yanagi

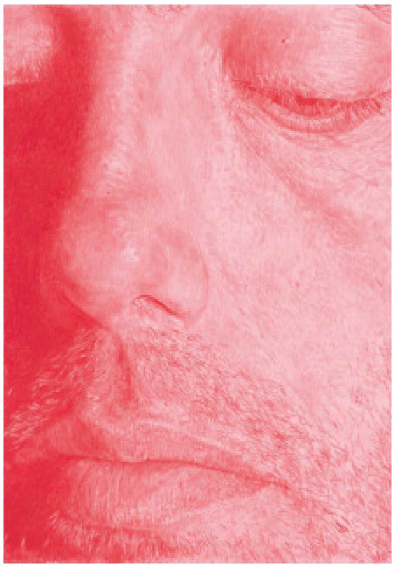
Pirelli HangarBicocca

In 1990 Yukinori Yanagi debuted *World Flag Ant Farm*, for which he represented national flags using colored sand and then allowed live ants to eat away at them—a statement, the artist said, on how displacement and immigration gradually erodes national identity. While a similar work won him a prize for emerging artists at the 1993 Venice Biennale, Yanagi remains little known in Italy. That may change with this Milan retrospective, which puts the focus on his large-scale installations about globalization.

Mar. 27–July 27



Yukinori Yanagi: *Hinomaru Illumination*, 2010.



Ed Atkins: Untitled, 2023.

Ed Atkins

Tate Britain

During the 2010s, Ed Atkins rocketed to fame for twitchily edited videos featuring male avatars who meditated on their own alienation. Then, after finding acclaim for crystallizing a type of ennui unique to the Web 2.0 era, Atkins went in a different direction, producing highly abstract poems and richly detailed drawings of his own body. How Atkins significantly shifted his style – and whether any thematic concerns have persisted amid that change – will come into focus in this show, his first major survey in the country of his birth.

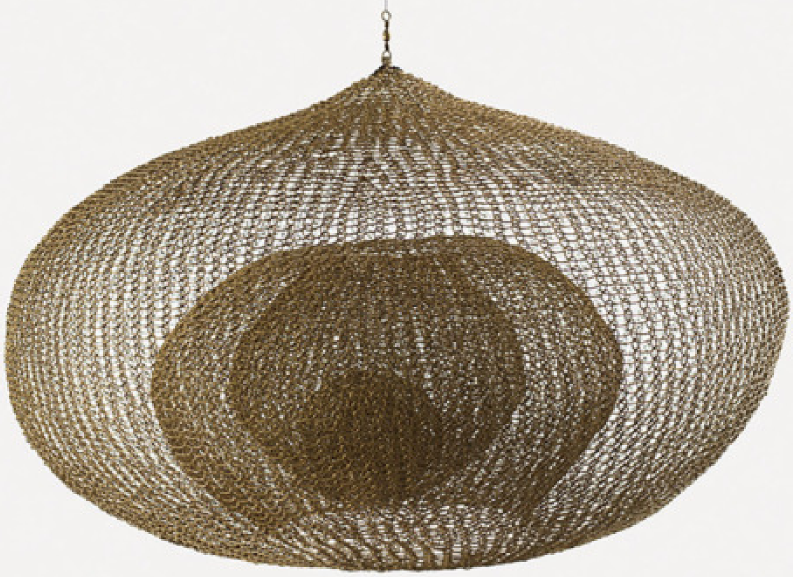
Apr. 2–Aug. 25

“Ruth Asawa: A Retrospective”

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

Ruth Asawa’s impossibly elegant wire sculptures will star in a career-spanning survey that opens in the artist’s hometown before traveling to MoMA in New York, the Guggenheim Bilbao, and Fondation Beyeler in Basel, Switzerland—all in time to overlap with the centennial of her birth. Some 300 of her works will be on hand in a show that also surveys her artistic network, giving attention to her Black Mountain College peers, among them Josef Albers, Buckminster Fuller, Ray Johnson, and others.

Apr. 4–Sept. 2



Ruth Asawa:
Untitled, 1953.

Digital rendering of the renovated Frick Collection.

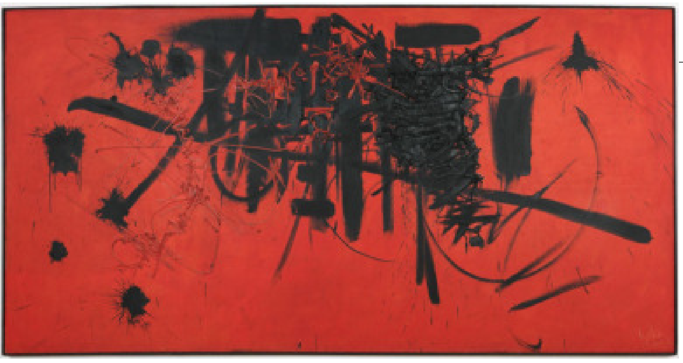
The Frick Goes Back Home

The Frick Collection

After three transient years in the Modernist dwelling that Marcel Breuer designed for the Whitney Museum, the Frick Collection is returning to its old home on Manhattan’s Upper East Side: a mansion that will be even more ornate after some significant sprucing up. A $290 million capital campaign was mounted for a renovation plan designed by art world starchitect Annabelle Selldorf, and viewers eager to return to a setting unlike any other in the city’s museum scene will finally have a chance to take in the grand atmosphere once again.

Opening in April

Yanagi: Photo Yanagi Studios; Atkins: ©Ed Atkins; Asawa: Photo Maris Hutchinson/Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/©Ruth Asawa Lanier, Inc./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Frick: Courtesy Selldorf Architects, New York



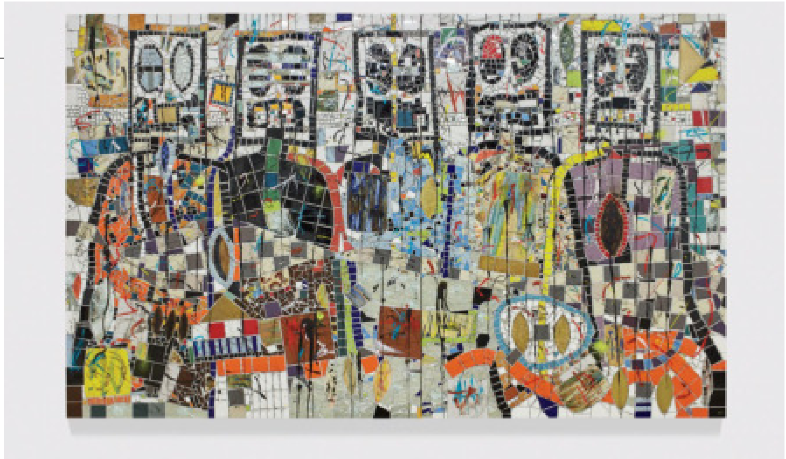
Georges Mathieu: *Tribute to Marshal de Turenne*, 1952.

Georges Mathieu

Monnaie de Paris

French painter Georges Mathieu garnered attention during the postwar era for treating painting like performance, creating sprawling murals splashed with color in public spaces for rapt audiences. How good are the resulting canvases without Mathieu on hand to enact them? This survey will offer the chance to properly reevaluate the late artist's work, with a significant grouping of large-scale works lured here from the Centre Pompidou, the exhibition's co-organizer.

Apr. 11–Sept. 7



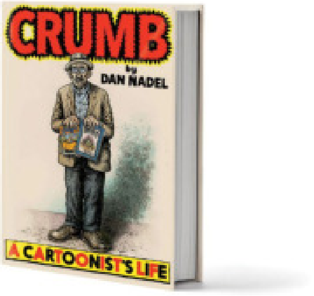
Rashid Johnson: *The Broken Five*, 2019.

"Rashid Johnson: A Poem for Deep Thinkers"

Guggenheim Museum

Rashid Johnson's striking abstractions incorporating a wide variety of materials—from smears of black soap to shards of glass—will take over the Guggenheim's rotunda in a show that ranks as the New York artist's biggest hometown showing yet. A site-specific work made for the exhibition will include an embedded piano for musical performances, and the 90-work show will start with a "sculptural stage" for events to activate the exhibition.

Apr. 18–Jan. 18

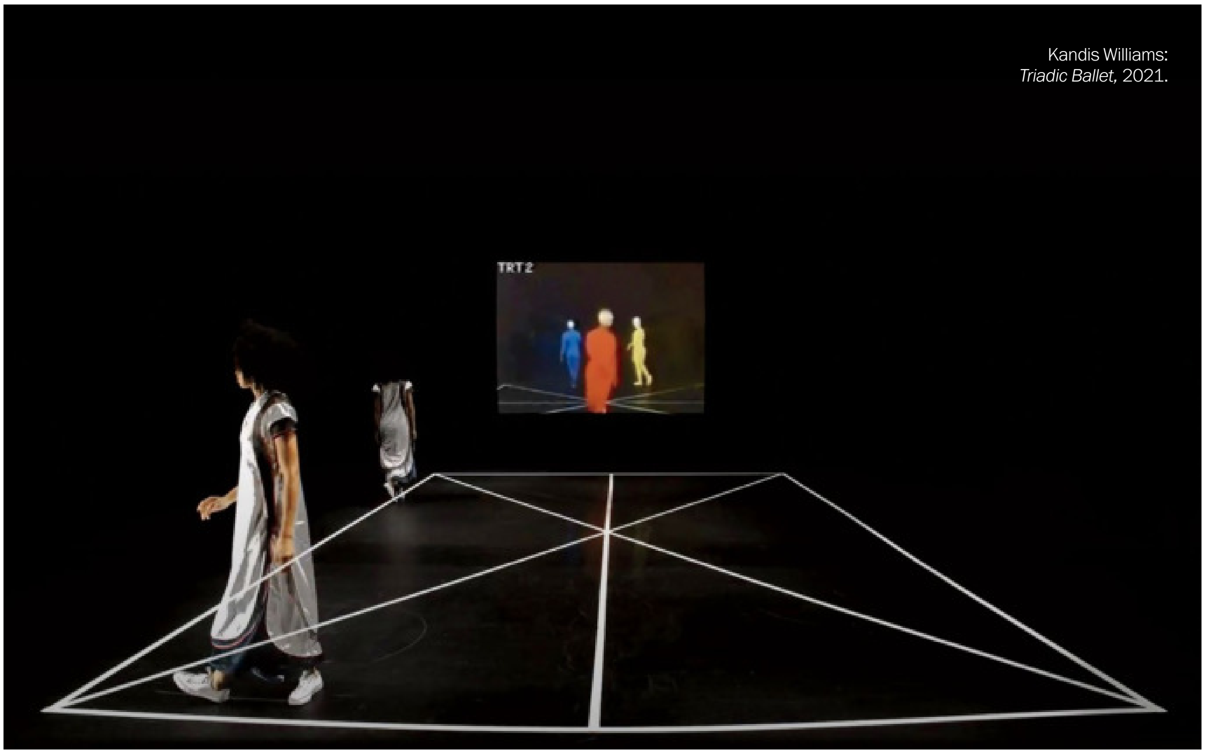


Crumb

by Dan Nadel

Many cartoonists await art-world acceptance, but R. Crumb is not one of them. He's had museum surveys in Paris, San Francisco, and elsewhere, and he shows with David Zwirner, one of the world's top galleries. Acceptance is not always accompanied by understanding, however, so let's welcome this biography by Dan Nadel, a curator and critic who has a reputation for advocating on behalf of figures on the fringes of mainstream art history. Across nearly 500 pages, Nadel charts how Crumb satirized hippie culture, the American Dream, and more – and later found a loyal following among artists.

On sale Apr. 15



Kandis Williams: *Triadic Ballet*, 2021.

"Kandis Williams: A Surface"

Walker Art Center

Kandis Williams's art has taken so many forms that it can be difficult to define by a single set of themes. Among her offerings are sculptures of plants strewn with photographs, collages of seemingly unlike pictures sourced from books and magazines, performances involving Black dancers, and films related to those performances. And that fails to mention Cassandra Press, the publishing imprint she started in 2016. Williams's survey in Minneapolis will offer a good opportunity to take stock of the young phenom's work.

Apr. 24–Aug. 24

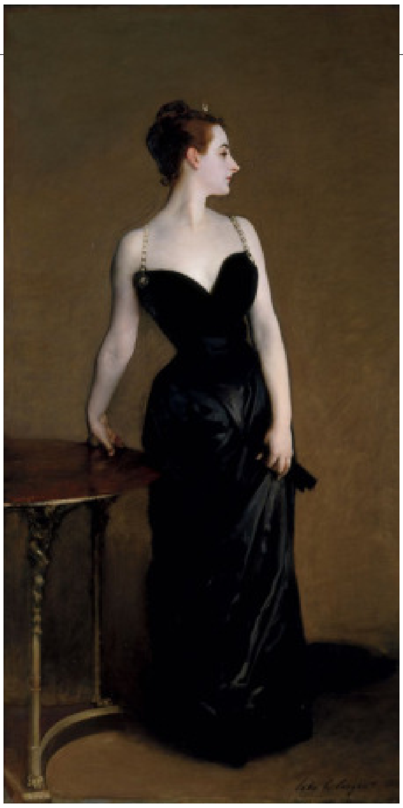
Mathieu: ©ADAGP, Paris/Courtesy Centre Pompidou, Paris; Johnson: Photo Martin Parsekian/©Rashid Johnson; *Crumb*: Courtesy Simon & Schuster, New York; Williams: Courtesy Morán Morán, Los Angeles

“Sargent and Paris”

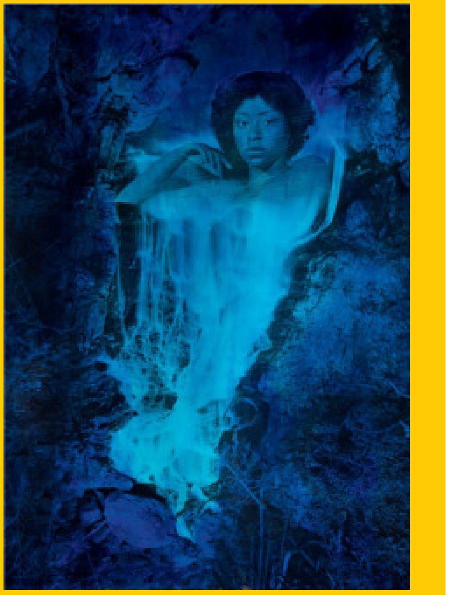
Metropolitan Museum of Art

This intriguing exhibition will flesh out one of the most beloved paintings in the Met’s collection: John Singer Sargent’s *Madame X* (1883–84), a portrait masterpiece with a story to tell. When first shown at the Paris Salon, the striking representation of Virginie Gautreau, an American from New Orleans living in Paris, stoked controversy among critics who derided it as lurid and too idiosyncratic to take seriously. The reaction so disappointed Sargent that he redacted the sitter’s name – only to immortalize her in a different way. Along with other works from Sargent’s formative Paris years, this exhibition will show *Madame X* in the context of preparatory sketches and portraits of fellow Parisians by some of Sargent’s peers.

Apr. 27–Aug. 3



John Singer Sargent: *Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau)*, 1883–84.



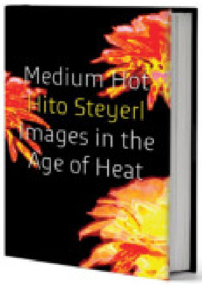
Lorna Simpson:
Night Fall, 2023.

“Lorna Simpson: Source Notes”

Metropolitan Museum of Art

Lorna Simpson broke through in the ’90s as a conceptual photographer, but in recent years, she has repositioned herself as a painter. This exhibition examines connections between her work in different mediums, especially in paintings that often include found photographs. Among the more than 30 works on view will be several from Simpson’s “Special Characters” series, which superimposes visuals from fashion and cosmetic ads from *Ebony* magazine to form striking portraits.

May 19–Nov. 2



Medium Hot: Images in the Age of Heat

by Hito Steyerl

Though known mainly for her essayistic videos, Hito Steyerl also defined an era of art-making with her writings – in particular, “In Defense of the Poor Image,” a 2009 essay in which she made the case for low-resolution pictures that travel freely on the internet, and accrue new meaning as they are downloaded over and over again. With this new book, Steyerl returns to her ongoing interest in the nature of digital images, which have grown ever stranger as AI tools become publicly accessible. ChatGPT and large language models are among the subjects she considers here.

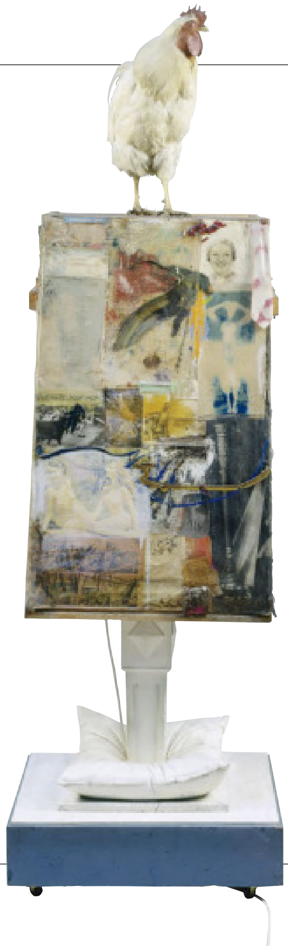
On sale May 20

“Five Friends: John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly”

Museum Brandhorst

It would hard to cast a group of five compatriots who shared a wider cultural reach during the postwar era than the figures paid tribute in this Munich exhibition. Their collective contributions to painting, sculpture, music, and dance are without peer, and all of them worked to forge connections between mediums that benefited from blurring together. The show will feature more than 150 works, as well as dance performances and concerts in a gallery focused on Twombly.

Apr. 10–Aug. 17



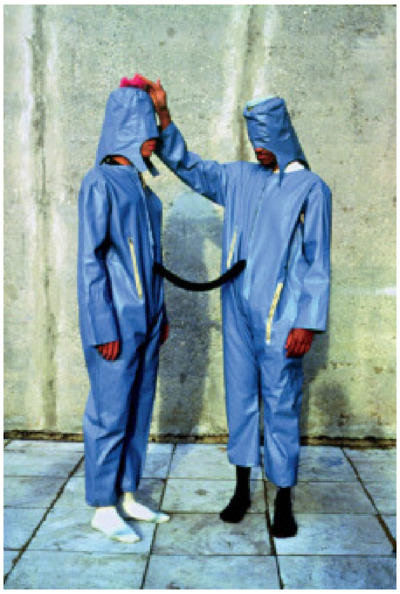
Robert Rauschenberg:
Odalisk, 1955–58.

“Lygia Clark: A Retrospective”

Neue Nationalgalerie

After Brazilian artist Lygia Clark established herself as an icon in the 1950s with geometric paintings, she turned away from painting in favor of participatory sculpture and performances. This first Clark retrospective in Germany will focus in part on how she incorporated viewers into her art, with interactivity among Berliners encouraged by way of exhibition copies of sculptures and “sensory objects” meant to engage more than the eye.

May 23–Oct. 12



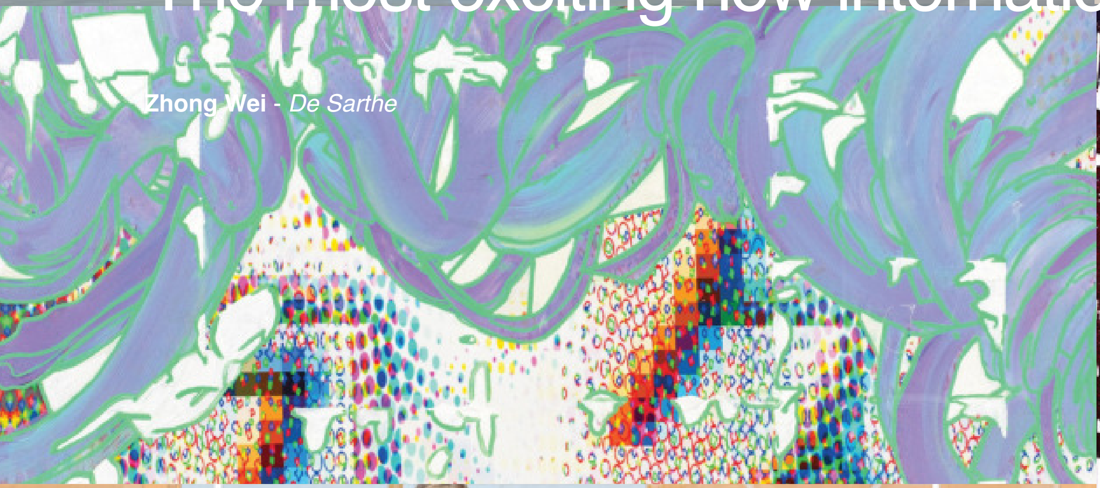
Lygia Clark: *The I and the you: Cloth-body-cloth*, 1967.

Sargent: Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Simpson: Photo James Wang/©Lorna Simpson/Courtesy Hauser & Wirth, New York; *Medium Hot*: Courtesy Verso Books, New York; Rauschenberg: ©Robert Rauschenberg/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn; Clark: ©“The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association

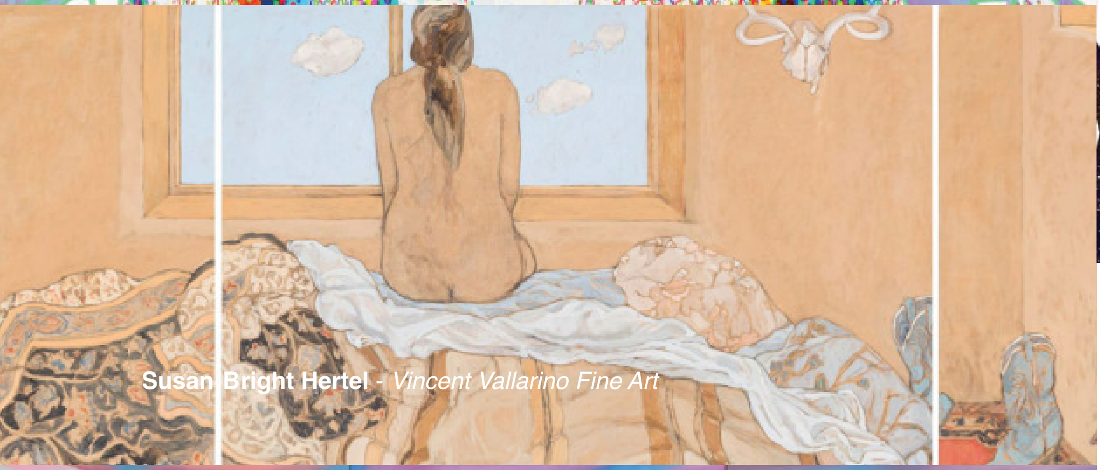
The most exciting new international art fair in America

John Brosio - *Arcadia Contemporary*

Danielle Hacche - *Bentley Gallery*


Zhong Wei - *De Sarthe*

Retna - *New River Fine Art*


Susan Bright Hertel - *Vincent Vallarino Fine Art*

Mak2 - *De Sarthe*

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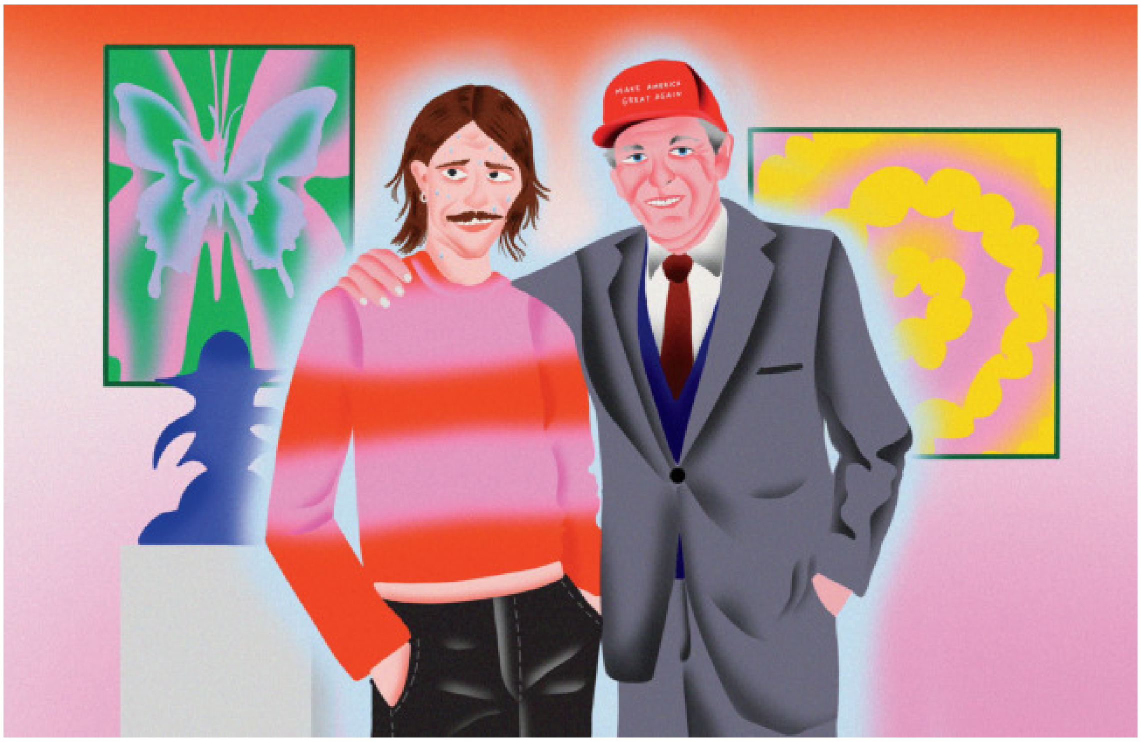
Hard Truths

A collector's politics prove problematic, and a dubious dealer asks for a kidney.

by Chen & Lampert



A collector who has been very helpful to me commissioned a sculpture for a complex he is building in Frankfurt. He stopped by my studio to look at renderings and shared that Trump is making him an ambassador as payback for all the campaign funds he raised. We've always kept politics far to the side, but I cannot sweep this away. I'm contractually bound to see this project through, but I must wind down our personal relationship. How can I do that without letting him know how I really feel?

We've been trying hard lately to avoid making inflammatory political comments, so our answer may not be as Burger King flame-broiled as expected. Beloved *Hard Truths* readers know how devastating it can be when we "go there," but they cannot comprehend the damage it does to our bodies and psyches when we Hulk-out in the name of ethics. The past year has been a helluva ride no matter how you voted (even if you're a deplorable who didn't), and at the moment we lack the stem cells to adequately ignite our ire.

It was once easy to compartmentalize your collector's developer money and political affiliations, but now that your side has lost, you can't stomach it. That's perfectly understandable and entirely hypocritical. Are you worried that his patronage makes you complicit in democracy's demise? Lefty activists would literally argue "yes" because he enabled both you and, well, fascism. Keep in mind that you are sharing a boat with other A-list artists (many of whom protest the loudest) whose commodities attract kleptocrats and crypto chuds. The thing that you all have going for you is that Joe Schmo Americans definitely despise your work. Feel the glow of their scorn when you walk away from your next commission.

It is easy to ghost this ick without yanking his chain, assuming you want to stay in the pocket of the deal. Keep meetings brief and always have another appointment booked after. Only discuss work when together and avoid taking photos with him. Don't RSVP to his next few invites, and change studio visits to Zooms. Answer every fifth text and set up an "out of studio" reply to be sent in response to his emails. Actually, you might not have to do anything because he's going on a four-year paid vacation to a country where he inevitably won't speak the language and will be wrapped up learning local bribe customs while eating spicy food.

I'm in a bind. My gallerist is a reformed alcoholic with end-stage renal failure. He read a *New York Times* article about the gallerist who received a transplanted liver from one of her artists, and has started texting to see if I'll give him a kidney. It's a big ask, given that I haven't exhibited with him since 2016. My last show performed below expectation, and when it was all over, I realized that he charged me for the warm beer served at the opening. He hasn't replied to requests for a studio visit in years, and he smiles but won't engage at openings. I have not been able to land another gallery, and I don't want him to die, which makes me wonder if this represents a career opportunity. He'll have to give me a show if I give him a kidney, right?

What is the old adage … a gallerist in need is a gallerist indeed? Art world business relationships are confusing, and the line between sociopathic boss and narcissistic friend is thinner than your frayed paint brushes and underwear. A kidney today or a soul tomorrow – you're ready to ante up your body for a seat in the game. Hit up the gallerist with a kidney selfie and get a notarized commitment for a solo booth at the next major art fair, a peak-season gallery exhibition, a new 80/20 split, and an old-school monthly stipend (to help keep your organs healthy). If he doesn't agree, send another pic of your kidney lunching with high-net-worth organ traffickers in the Art Basel VIP Lounge and just wait for his quivering text to arrive! ●

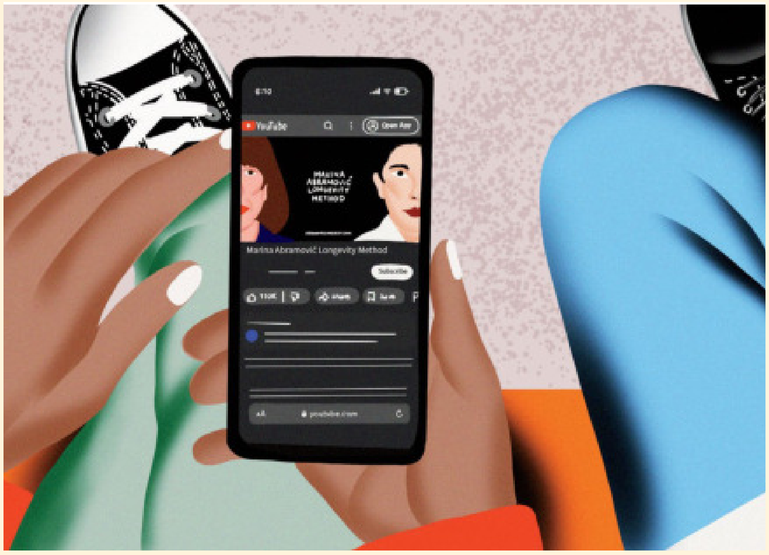
Howie Chen *is a curator who has also worked as a derivatives analyst.*

Andrew Lampert *is an artist, archivist, film restorationist, author, and curator.*

Your queries for Chen & Lampert can be submitted to hardtruths@artinamericamag.com

Quiz

Should You Try Marina Abramović's Longevity Method?


YouTube
Open App
MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ LONGEVITY METHOD
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People say art is a young person's game, and with all the hot artist and influencer portraits in magazines and social media, it feels like the industry insists that your painted face is as important as your painting. Last year, Marina Abramović launched a wellness line to share the beauty secrets that have made her a performance art maven for half a century. With the promise of the fountain of youth, should you ingest her ancient potions to gain the power to sit in a chair for three months straight?

1. Which of Marina Abramović's wellness products promise to help you tackle "the art of living well"?

a) Energy drops
b) Immune drops
c) GHB drops

2. Abramović's concept of "living in the present" is simply:

a) Being sandwiched between two naked people
b) Telling young music festivalgoers to be quiet
c) Peeing in a bedpan while staring someone in the eyes

3. Taking Abramović's Immune Drops in recommended doses of "50-60 drops two times a day" will make you:

a) Immune to being able to pay rent
b) Immune to artistic quality control
c) Immune to any of your old friends and loved ones

4. Abramović states that "joy, in its purest form, is a powerful antidote to the stresses of daily life." What else is a powerful antidote?

a) Adderall
b) Cojones extract
c) Free gluten

5. Which of these terms are you least likely to find on the Longevity Method website?

a) "Muffled scream"
b) "Constant Comment"
c) "Humble"

6. If Abramović sold purifying incense, it might smell like:

a) Eau de fresh-baked Subway bread
b) Aroma of desperation
c) Parfüm von Klaus Biesenbach

7. Which of these is the ancient secret ingredient in all of Abramović's products?

a) Pink cocaine
b) Lithium
c) Student loan debt

8. What kind of yoga pose is recommended while dosing on the Longevity Method?

a) "I'm in a Jay-Z video" pose
b) "This is not self-harm" pose
c) "Entrepreneur" pose

9. It is said that Abramović's grandmother gave her the secrets of natural healing. What else did the artist get from her?

a) Her Mr. Potato Head voodoo doll
b) Her world-famous humility
c) Her penchant for exaggeration

10. Cheaper alternatives to the Longevity Method include:

a) Snail mucin
b) Goop
c) Oil of Ulay

Question	Points for each choice		
1	A) 1	B) 1	C) 3
2	A) 3	B) 1	C) 2
3	A) 3	B) 2	C) 1
4	A) 3	B) 3	C) 1
5	A) 1	B) 1	C) 3
6	A) 2	B) 3	C) 1
7	A) 2	B) 1	C) 3
8	A) 1	B) 1	C) 1
9	A) 1	B) 1	C) 3
10	A) 2	B) 2	C) 1

Key

If you scored:

10–16:

Your desire to cleanse yourself of toxins and trauma has led you to double down on tinctures and elixirs. If you look at Marina Abramović and think, "yeah, that's what I need," then there is simply no way to prevent you from helping you help yourself.

17–23:

You want to feel better, but you don't want to spend a lot of money on the path to wellness. Rather than starve your wallet, you might want to feed your soul "Double Stuf" Oreos and a shot of reality Goldschläger.

24–30:

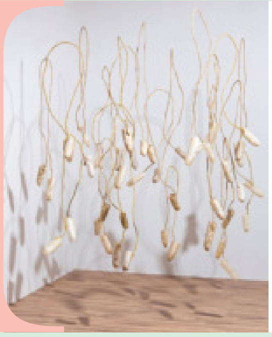
Chances are you already own a bottle of aspirin. Donate the cash you would have spent on the Longevity Method to a trusted charity if you want to make yourself and others feel better.

Illustrations by Pamela Guest

Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu

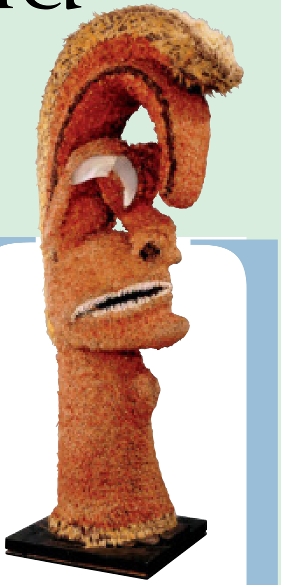
The cocurator of the 2025 edition of the Hawai‘i Triennial discusses Indigeneity and artists as healers.

1



Many of **Sonya Kelliher-Combs**’s works are about the prevalence of suicide in Alaska Native communities. She has a series called “Idiot Strings,” referring to the cord that connects a pair of mittens. A prominent feature of her work, the strings evoke a kind of body form, as one might imagine them hanging around someone’s neck; the idiot strings, suspended in the air and lit so as to cast shadows, seem to indicate the presence of what once was. The shadows are a reminder of people’s continuing presence here with us, their impact and their legacy. Not only are the works really tender, they serve as an opportunity for connection as viewers consider this relevant and widespread issue within the Native communities.

2



Rocky Jensen was a contemporary Native Hawaiian artist who passed away by his own hand in 2023. As a carver and illustrator, he started an organization in 1975 called Hale Naua III, through which he tried to push for a new form of visual language for Native Hawaiians that allowed freedom to express one’s indigeneity through material alternatives. He took this kind of liberty in his own work for 50 years, but people weren’t ready for such non- or post-traditional thinking. One work of his is an *akua hulu manu* based on a feathered god image made of wood. This one, however, is about three feet tall and has little silver teeth in homage to his grandson, who lost his own when he was young.

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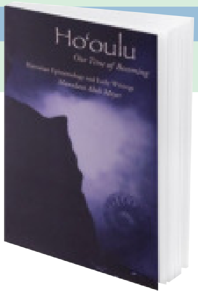
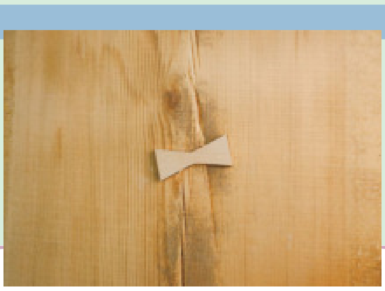


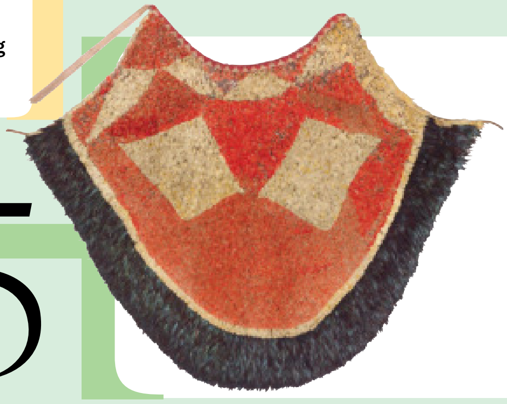
Educator, philosopher, and author Manulani Meyer’s 2018 book ***Ho‘oulu: Our Time of Becoming*** touches on the idea of *e pluribus unum* and the drive to homogenize those who live within our borders. It’s important to think more deeply about how, by recognizing and honoring our differences, we can see the humanity in each of us. As we plan the Hawai‘i Triennial, we have been thinking about not just centering the triennial in Hawaii, at the edge of the US, but in the Pacific, as the center of this Pacific core, meaning Pacific Asia and beyond.

4



In Hawaii, a ***pewa***, or butterfly patch, not only heals a fracture but beautifies the object in which it occurred. The point is not to hide that the break happened, but to mend it. The presence of a *pewa* also means that whatever the object is, it is treasured and worth fixing. And it’s fixed for the purpose of continuity in its life. But there was a reason the original cracked or broke, and, as a result, the *pewa* has to be made of stronger material. I’ve been thinking about *pewas* in relation to artists and how they identify communal and global fractures in their work. Using art as a way of addressing pain and injustice to draw our attention and, hopefully, action, can help heal these fissures and societal cracks.

5

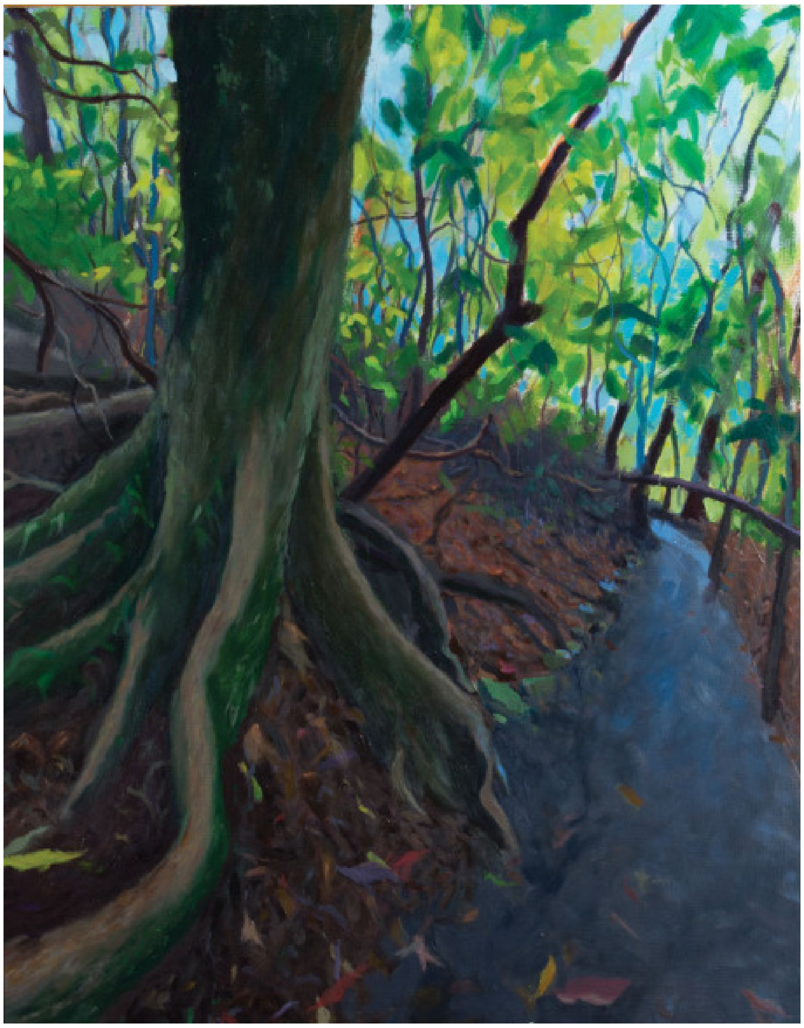


The US model has been to repatriate under the law NAGPRA, but when we force people to do the right thing it’s not transformative. Internationally, there have been opportunities to restitute material culture and human remains outside these legal requirements. For example, when Captain Cook came to Hawaii, he was gifted a **cloak from Chief Kalani‘ōpu‘u**. He took it off his shoulders and put it on Cook’s. It was an honest gift. More than 200 years later, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa decided the cloak belongs home. I think we need to get away from this idea of museums as a dead end as opposed to a way station.

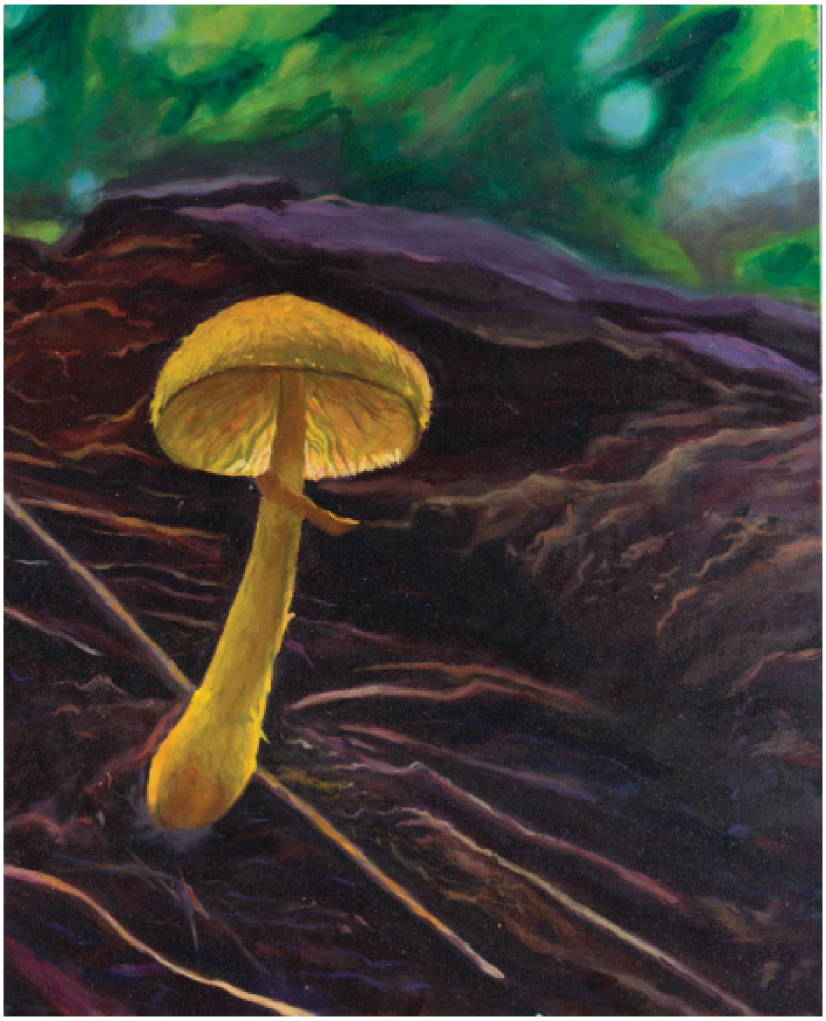
— as told to Francesca Aton

Portrait: Photo Brandyn Liu/Courtesy Hawai‘i Contemporary; 1: Photo Chris Arend; 2: ©The Trustees of the British Museum; 3: Courtesy Native Books, Honolulu; 4: Photo Stas Davydenko via Adobe Stock; 5: Courtesy Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Paul Kerepka



Rain Forest in Springbrook National Park,
Queensland, Australia
oil, 30 x 24



Yellow Mushroom, Broken head Reserve,
NSW, Austraila
oil, 30 x 24

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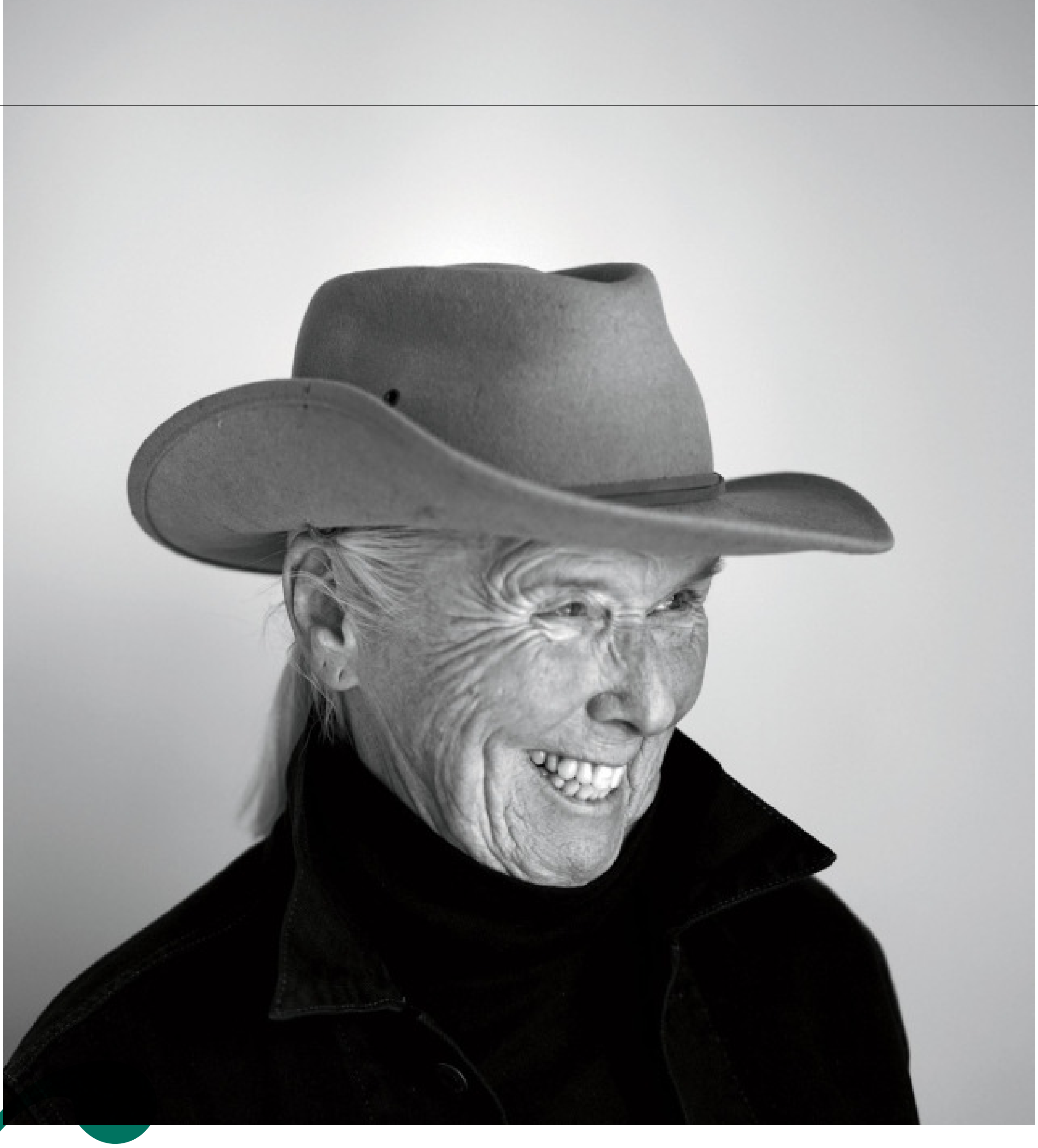


Q&A

Living on the Edge

Harmony Hammond's material metaphors work toward political ends.

by Nicole Kaack

Political discourse has always flowed freely in Harmony Hammond's art. Hammond arrived in New York in 1969, months after the Stonewall riots rocked Greenwich Village. Against the backdrop of the gay liberation and women's liberation movements, she came of age as an artist while attending consciousness-raising meetings and participating in the founding of A.I.R. Gallery, the first women-run nonprofit artist cooperative in the United States. After coming out in 1973, Hammond became an outspoken proponent of lesbian feminism, coediting the 1977 issue of *Heresies* dedicated to lesbian art, and curating "A Lesbian Show" at the artist-run venue 112 Greene Street in 1978. Decades later, she literally wrote the book on the subject: *Lesbian Art in America: A Contemporary History*, published by Rizzoli in 2000.

Over the last five decades, Hammond has forged a materially conscious and process-oriented vocabulary that mobilizes modernist formalism to political ends. In the '70s, she incorporated fabric remnants into a radical body of textile-based paintings (like her "Floorpieces" from 1973) and sculptures (such as *Hunkertime* 1979–80) that drew upon traditions associated with women, the

Photo Clayton Porter

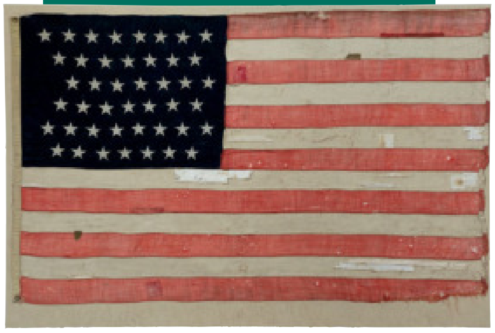
domestic sphere, and non-Western cultures. Encoded in the language of abstraction, sociopolitical concerns continue to figure in Hammond's recent paintings. Working through emblematic processes – including binding, tearing, piecing, patching, and suturing – on almost monochromatic surfaces, paintings such as *Patched* (2022) and *Double Cross I* (2021) caution against patterns of violence, and cipher collectivity for disenfranchised voices.

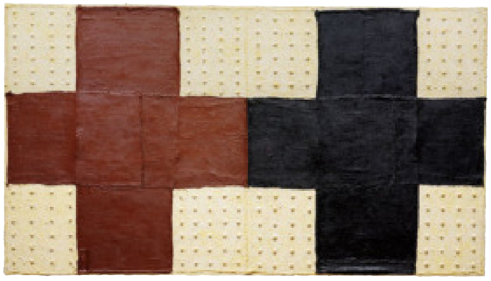
A defining voice in contemporary feminist and queer abstraction, Hammond has received her due in recent years: In 2019 the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum held a 50-year survey of her work and, last year, she was included in the Whitney Biennial. "FRINGE," a recently opened solo exhibition at SITE Santa Fe on view until May 19, focuses on work produced since 2014, including her series of "Bandaged Grids," "Chenilles," "Bandaged Quilts," and "Crosses." *A.i.A.* spoke with Hammond about the processes and material metaphors that have characterized her practice from the 1970s to today.

"FRINGE," the title of your SITE Santa Fe show, can be read a number of different ways. What does it connote to you?
It's a verb and a noun. The idea of fringe and fringing has to do with edges and marginalized spaces. Going back to the 1970s, the metaphorical associations of edges as meeting points have interested me and been crucial to the formal strategies that I employ. Are people pushed to the fringes, or do they choose to be there? How do things or people meet at those edges? Is there a tension, a friction, a negotiation? The fringe is not just a passive place. In fact, it is very active and charged. It's the place that I choose to occupy.

Layers and what is hidden underneath are recurrent themes in your work. How are you thinking about visibility and opacity?
I'm trained as a painter. I work via accumulation. From my fabric work of the '70s to the work I do now, it's additive. Whether you call it painting or sculpture, that's what I do. In my early "Bags" and "Presences," the hanging strips of paint-saturated cloth are three-dimensional brushstrokes. Accumulation over time, over space – that sense of building from the inside out – is very much about agency and occupying space.

The works of the last 15 years exist in a third space between painting and sculpture. They build up paint slowly and intimately in thick, near-monochrome layers. The painting becomes a metaphor for the body. There was a period where the paintings were a dark phthalo blue, at times looking black or iridescent. The color and surface were fugitive, or what we could call queer. Recent paintings are mostly lighter in color, emphasizing surface incident. Lumps, bumps, protrusions, seams, splits, stains, and grommet holes formally open up the pictorial space. At the same time, they suggest body orifices, or wounds, with the paint acting as a healing poultice. When I wrap a painting, the straps often wrap around the edges to the back. You can think of that as bandaging, binding, bondage, but it is also embracing the painting. It's about strengthening – like an athlete bandaging a knee.



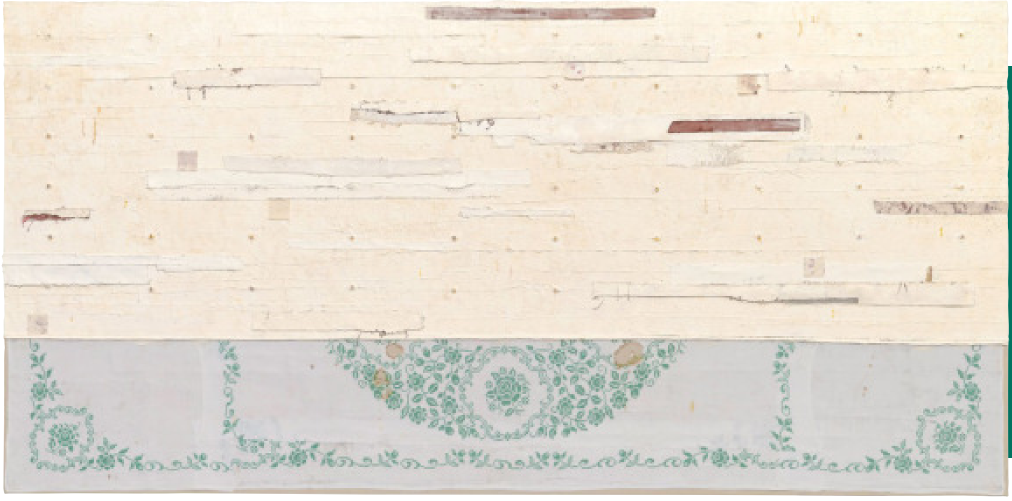


Harmony Hammond: *Bandaged Flag*, 2021 (top), and *Double Cross I*, 2021 (bottom).

How do surface and texture factor in?
In my recent paintings, light and shadow are crucial. The surfaces are very much *in relief* – interesting words! – returning to the idea of edges. When I think of edges in painting, I don't just think of the perimeter; I also think of the painting surface as an edge between art and life, those bumps pushing up from underneath, seams splitting open, or what looks like body fluids oozing out of the holes. I'm thinking conceptually about the underlayers of paint and color. I'm really interested in what's buried and asserting itself onto or through the top surface. The shadows have to be there, as do the fabric's seams and loose threads. Seams are connectors. I like the connections to be visible. It's what I call a "survivor aesthetic," making a whole out of pieces.

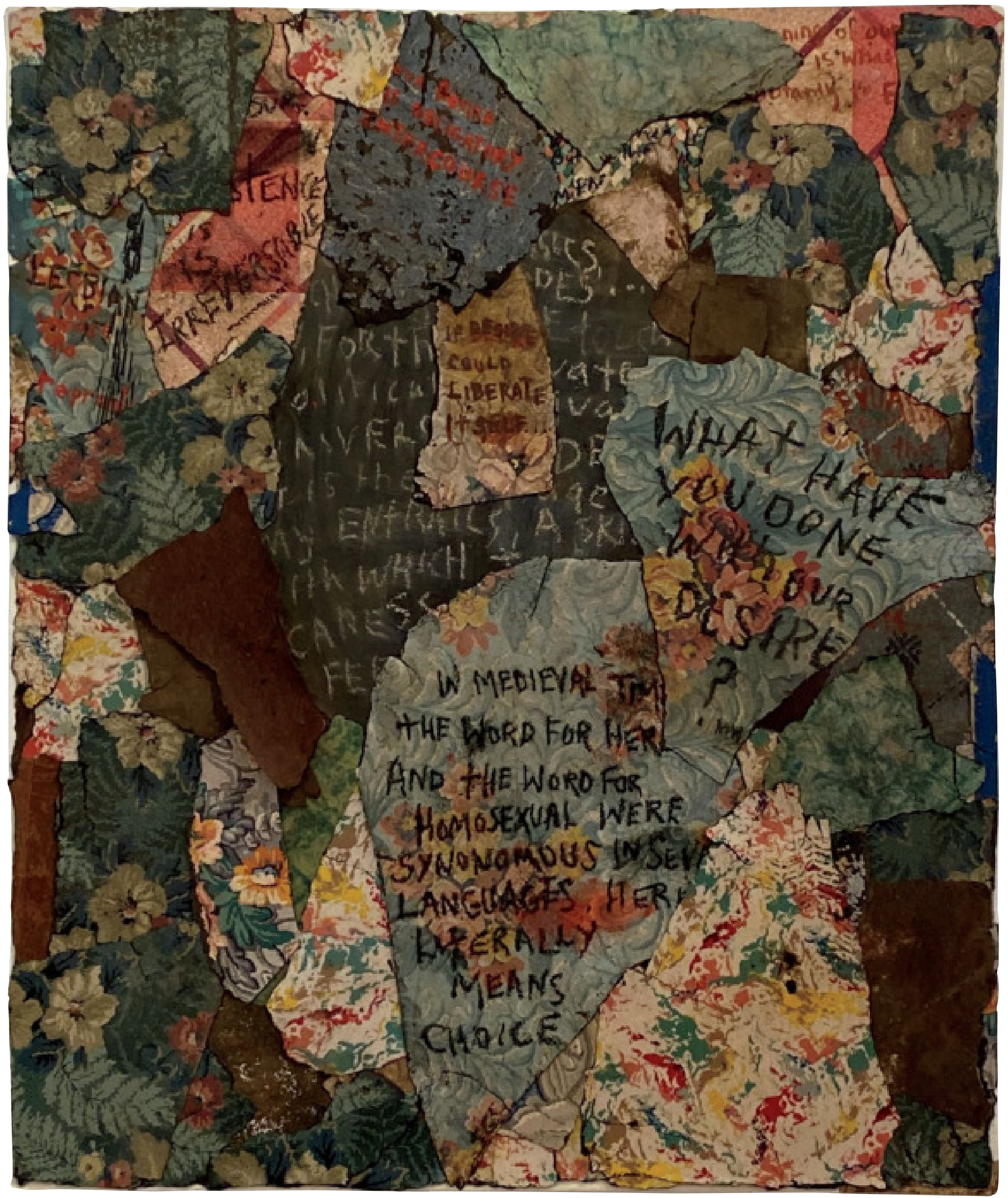
All these visual strategies have meaning attached to them. I'm using the materials and how they are manipulated to bring social and political content into the work, which is actually quite formal. For example, a piece of fabric that's cut has a different feeling than one that's torn and fraying. Materials have histories and memories, whether they're traditional art materials or what we would call nonart materials.

The metaphorical relationship between material and concept is fundamental in your work. How are you working with language?
Words come and go in my work. I mostly use them to suggest connections or to tell a story that needs to be told. But I also use words in relation to various visual strategies. For example, in my series "Bandaged Grids," I affix bandages over a grid of holes that suggest wounds. The fabric strips that bandage the painting body are mostly horizontal. When I look at those, I often think of them as sentences – words covering up and over. In the "Double Cross" paintings, doubling is about

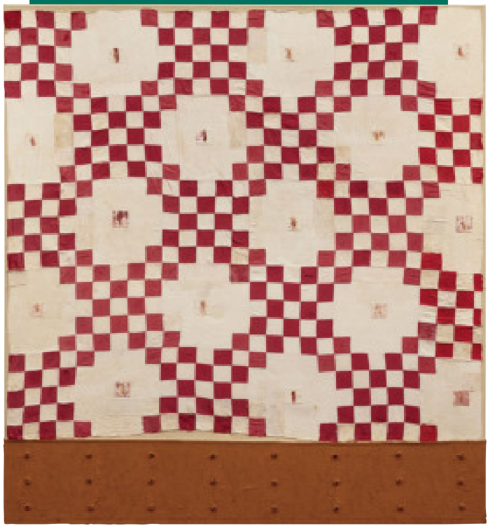


Bandaged Grid #10 (La Mesa), 2022.

Courtesy the artist (3)


LESBIAN
EXISTENCE IS IRREVERSIBLE
IF DESIRE COULD LIBERATE ITSELF
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH OUR DESIRE ?
IN MEDIEVAL TIMES THE WORD FOR HERESY AND THE WORD FOR HOMOSEXUAL WERE SYNONOMOUS IN SEVERAL LANGUAGES HERESY LITERALLY MEANS CHOICE

Voices I, 2023.



Patched, 2022.

sameness and difference – and, therefore, queer desire. But "double cross" also suggests betrayal. I am playing with words. I use visual imagery with meaning attached to it in the same way that we attach meaning to text.

In my abstract paintings, voices assert themselves from underneath the surface skin of paint. To me, that's a political statement. But there are times I do a piece that is more overtly political. There are a few of these works in the SITE exhibition – *Bandaged Flag* (2021), *Patched* (2022), or *Voices I* (2023). *Voices I*, for example, is composed of pieces of vintage linoleum with fragmented quotes from the French lesbian feminist writer Monique Wittig, one of which asks, "what have you done with our desire?" Both ways of working are about the same thing: voice, censorship, agency.

From the '70s through the '90s, you created sculptures informed by an additive sensibility. That dimensionality is still in your current work, but there is also a dialogue with modernist painting. What do you see as the continuities between these bodies of work?

In the early '70s, content that reflected the lives and experiences of women was not welcome in the painting field. Many feminist artists stopped painting and began to work with materials and techniques that reflected women's lives and traditions of creativity. That's when I began to work extensively with fabric, absorbing, embracing, and flaunting traditions of weaving, needlework, and the art of non-Western cultures.

My early fabric works were unstretched – I was painting on blankets, sheets, and curtains hanging push-pinned to the wall, the weight of the acrylic-saturated fabric altering the painting rectangle. Gradually they moved off the wall into space and I realized that I was a painter making what people call sculpture. When I titled the sculptures "Presences," I was intentionally claiming the notion of presence as essence made visible, in opposition to Michael Fried's gendered theorization and dismissal of that term. A lot of my work at that time had to do with women taking and occupying space. When I talk about presence, even in the paintings I do today, I'm talking about work that occupies a space larger than its physical space. Going back to the '70s, that's paralleled in an early women's movement phrase: "The personal is political."

And those processes became the basis for a new modernist framework?

In 1974 I began a series of "Weave Paintings," that brought gendered traditions of woven cloth back into the painting field on my own terms. The surfaces of these stretched canvases were slowly built up with layers of oil paint mixed with Dorland's wax medium. I then incised herringbone or braided "weave" patterns into the top layer, cutting into the skin of paint to reveal underlying color. The paint wasn't completely dry while I worked, causing little points of paint to protrude. These were slightly menacing, but also fragile, and mirrored the painting's irregular contour. From a distance, the paintings appeared monochrome, but up close, the under colors showed through. The "weave" paintings anticipated many of the concerns in my current work – participating in the modernist narrative of abstraction and, at the same time, challenging or interrupting it with political and social content. ●

From left: Courtesy the artist; Courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

1934

Lorraine O’Grady

2024

The heady conceptualist and performer mentored a fellow artist on the importance of generosity and thought.

by Chloë Bass

In 2016 I sent Lorraine O’Grady an invitation to be the first guest for my talk-show project, *What is shared, what is offered*, at Independent Curators International in New York. I was 32 at the time; Lorraine was 82. At that point, she and I had met briefly through Simone Leigh’s initiative Black Women Artists for Black Lives Matter, organized as part of “The Waiting Room,” Leigh’s New Museum exhibition that same year. In my initial email, I addressed Lorraine formally as “Ms. O’Grady” and presented myself as someone who had been profoundly influenced by her conceptual work.

Five days later, I received a response that has become the cornerstone of my own ability to say no. Henceforth, I have referred to this message, both privately and publicly, as a lesson from the “Lorraine O’Grady School of Refusal.”

After expressing thanks for the invitation, Lorraine wrote, “Sadly, due both to greatly increased production and writing schedules and to advancing age—and with a heavy dose of ‘tough love’ from others—I’ve finally adopted hard-and-fast protective rules for myself: (1) No more than two public events per year ... And (2) No further interviews at this time.” At the end, she added, “I hope it will work for us to work together at another time.”

This message was not a rejection. It was the beginning of an artistic friend- and mentorship.

Lorraine has left behind her enduring concept of “both/and”—a rejection of the “either/or” binary that brings artists of color toward critical flexibility beyond the bounds of Western thought. The act of memorialization itself is both/and: when we eulogize, although the purpose is to honor the dead, the memories, language, and mode of emotional presentation are entirely that of the still-living speaker. In other words, this is as much about me as it is about Lorraine. It is a gift, and also a responsibility.

In 2018 I went to a book launch for Aruna D’Souza’s *Whitewalling*, an event at the Brooklyn Museum that featured Lorraine as a speaker. Lorraine spoke aloud a simple idea that I and many others in the room had felt but never put into language before: the idea that white supremacy may no longer require white people in order to reproduce itself. I have often felt a proximity to certain historical legacies, but at that moment, I was quite sure that I had witnessed a historic *moment*. Lorraine had that ability—to leave us with an unsettled chill with just a single sentence—and to present an idea that is both ahead of its time and inevitable.

Lorraine was the person who pushed me toward greater rigor, and encouraged me not to become anyone other than my weird—and sometimes difficult—creative self. It was Lorraine who taught me, through her practice and her guidance, that the production of a masterpiece—the only kind of art she said she had time for—entails not just the conception, realization, and presentation of an artwork. It also includes all the detailed work around the work: the correspondence, the theory, the interviews, the interpretation, the citation, the footnotes, the hyperlinking.

Lorraine left me with a lot. I treasure a trove of correspondence that includes inquiries about both when I met my husband *and* when we became lovers; a request to explain TSA Precheck and Global Entry; and, more recently, links to two beautiful music videos featuring roller-skating. And I’ll always treasure a backlog of ideas that will feed me for a lifetime.

It was Lorraine who, through her series of “Performance Statement” writings, introduced me to a relationship to performance as both an acceptable political option and a problematic category with which to identify. It was Lorraine who made me understand “writing in space” as an integral part of an artistic practice. And it was Lorraine who helped me connect with my gallery, Alexander Gray Associates. As an artist who has followed personal obsession rather than the market, with work that shifts in form and material, it is a true gift that she supported me in that way.

This past July, the last time we saw each other in person before her death, I told Lorraine she was impeccable. She laughed, and said it took a lot of work.

The work was worth it. I will miss my mentor. I will miss my friend. Lorraine O’Grady’s memory is already a blessing. ●

Photo Ross Collab

Photography vs. AI

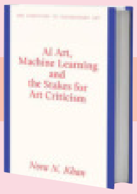
Two modes of producing pictures go head-to-head.

Latest Literature

By Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa

Dark Mirrors

vs.

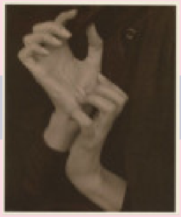


By Nora N. Khan

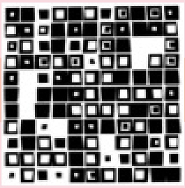
Cool Curator

Drew Sawyer of the Whitney vs. **Daniela Lieja Quintanar of REDCAT**

Early Artist "Disrupters"



Alfred Stieglitz vs. **Vera Molnar**

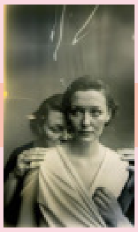


Preeminent Princess Pictures

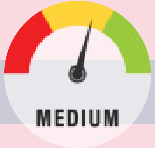
Princess Diana vs. **Princess Kate**

Trickster Picture

Robert Capa's *Falling Soldier* vs. **Boris Eldagsen's *Electrician***



Trustworthiness



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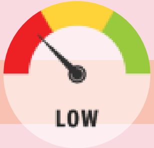
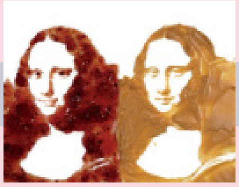
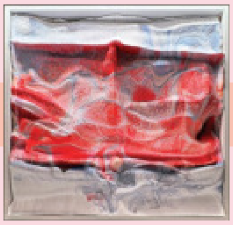


Iconic Meta Artworks



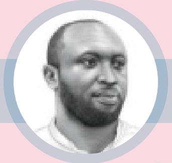
Vik Muniz's *Double Mona Lisa (Peanut Butter and Jelly)* vs. **Refik Anadol's *Unsupervised***



Edgelord Provocateur

Heji Shin vs. **Michael Christopher Brown**

Must-Read Critic

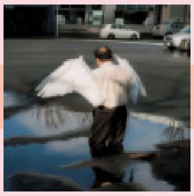


Emmanuel Iduma vs. **Sonja Drimmer**

Cutting-Edge Artist

Talia Chetrit

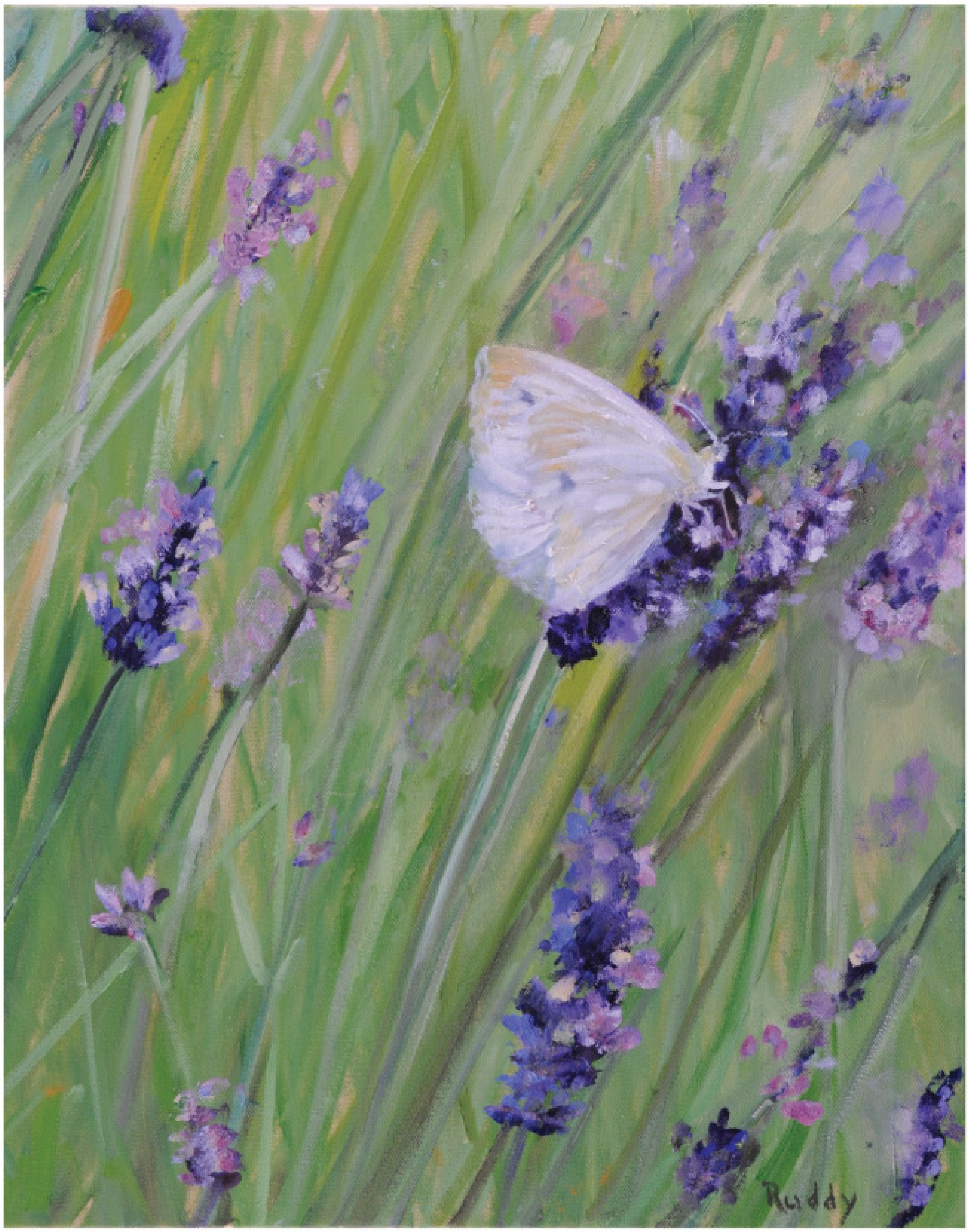
vs.



Charlie Engman

Wolukau-Wanambwa: Courtesy MACK, London; Khan: Courtesy Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd, London; Sawyer: Photo Bryan Derballa; Quintanar: Photo Juan Silverio; Stieglitz: ©The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Molnar: ©Banque d'Images, ADAGP/Art Resource, New York; Capa: ©Robert Capa/©International Center of Photography/Magnum Photos; Eldagsen: Courtesy Palmer Gallery, London; Muniz: ©Vik Muniz; Anadol: Photo Daniela Hritcu for *Art in America*; Iduma and Drimmer: Illustrations by Denise Nestor (2); Chetrit: Photo Achim Kukulies/Courtesy Sies + Höke Gallery, Düsseldorf; Engman: Courtesy MACK and SPBH Editions, London

SALLY RUDDY



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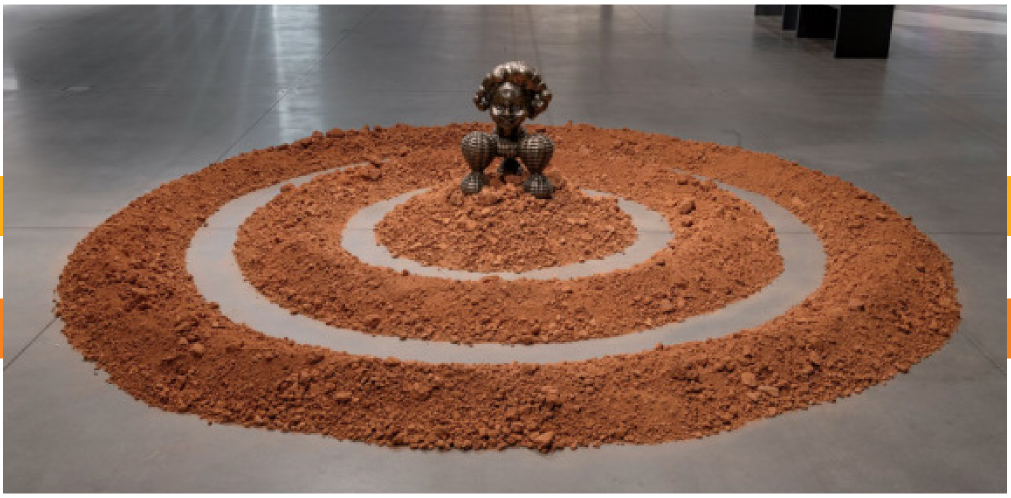
Minne Atairu

The New York–based Nigerian artist uses AI to remedy historical erasures.

by Shameekia Shantel Johnson



View of Minne Atairu's installation *To the Hand*, 2023, at The Shed, New York.

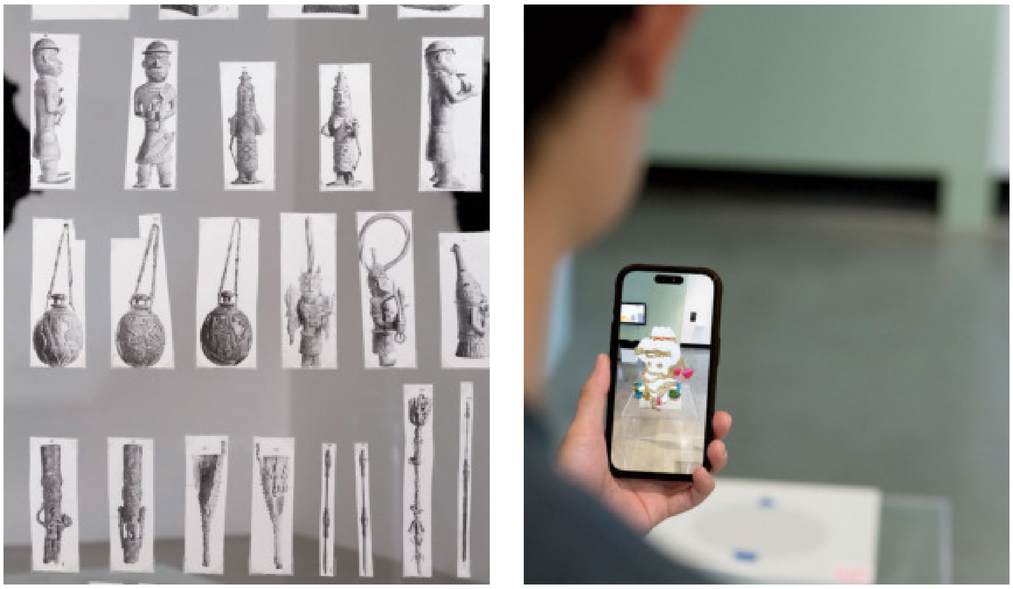
Minne Atairu's *Deshrined Ancestors* (2024) is a work of augmented reality, an animated 3D rendering of an ivory bust that oscillates between recognizable features and amorphic forms. Is it alien or human? It's hard to tell. The virtual sculpture appears smooth and rubberlike. Its primary face has cowrie shells for eyes and ram's-horn handles on each side of its head. The back of the sculpture features a petite totem of two baby doll heads crowned by a strand of red ribbon and adorned with gilded shells. Bulky gold chains wrap around the figure; mini heads in pink, fuchsia, and blue dangle like charms.

Deshrined Ancestors recently featured in the group exhibition "All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace" at REDCAT in Los Angeles, an exhibition exploring our evolving relationship with AI. The work is a speculative prototype of a Benin bronze meant to fill the gap left by those works lost and looted. A field recording of ceremonial cries and chants documented in Benin by British anthropologist Northcote W. Thomas between 1909 and 1910 accompanies the online version. Charles Kim's remix transforms the tribal sounds into a song. In the gallery, there's an empty podium representing a Benin bronze previously confined by RISD that has since been returned to Nigeria. Atairu troubles the history of stolen Benin bronzes, and echoes calls for repatriation. But rather than simply reiterating critique, she offers a gesture of repair, using AI trained on archives and oral histories, to remedy wounds of colonial violence and erasure.

Born in Benin, Nigeria, Atairu naturally gravitated toward the sacred artifacts that lived there before the 1897 British invasion. Modernism recast ceremonial objects as artworks, and what had belonged to the King of Benin and his people were detained in Western museums for their permanent collections. This stuck with Atairu, who studied art history as an undergraduate at University of Maiduguri, focusing "on various cultural movements in Benin," pre- and post-colonialization.

The technology part came a little later. The pandemic granted Atairu time to experiment with artmaking in unconventional ways: Given a lack of spatial, financial, and material resources, she began to work with artificial intelligence to develop artworks. Using tools like Midjourney, the artist began generating images of the Yoruba goddess Mami Wata. She works with Blender, converting text into 3D-printed sculptures, as in her 2023 installation at The Shed, *To the Hand* (2023). Part of "Igùn" (2020–), her series delving into the 17-year interregnum of artistic output under British conquest, *To the Hand* was also Atairu's pathway to exploring Benin material culture. After rendering the objects in Blender, she 3D-printed them using PLA filament, a thermoplastic polyester derived from natural sources like cornstarch or sugarcane, then infused with bronze. Surrounding the sculpture were rings of ground terra-cotta representing the walls and deep moats of Benin engineered to protect the kingdom from invaders.

Atairu is well aware of the growing skepticism around AI, especially within communities of color. She noted the racial biases within the system when we spoke. Nevertheless, her practice creates footnotes for creators to address the system's shortcomings and leaves a trail for future users. She believes in "revealing [issues of racial bias to make] sure that when they are in [our] communities, they don't traumatize us," adding that since AI is unlikely to go away, "someone has to do it." ●



Left, *ML Dataset from Benin Kingdom, 1899–1962* (detail), 2021, and right, *Deshrined Ancestors*, 2024, on view in the exhibition "All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace," 2024–25, at REDCAT, Los Angeles.

From top: Photo Adam Reich/Courtesy The Shed, New York; Photos Yubo Dong (ofstudio)/Courtesy REDCAT, Los Angeles (2)

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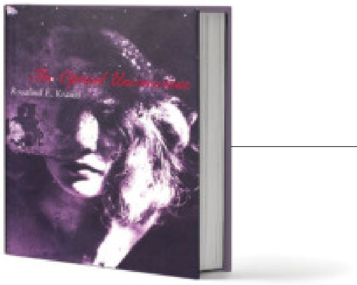
Miao Ying, *Technomancy at Polarized Rift* (detail), 2023. Courtesy of Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder and Kiang Malingue

The October Club

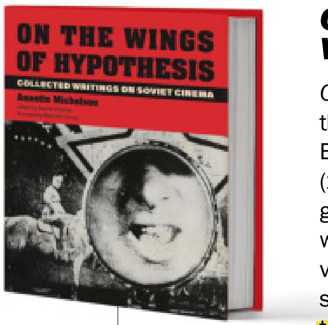
The quarterly journal *October* launched in 1976 with aims to counter the glossy "pictorial journalism" of arts magazines with critical rigor, documenting relationships between different art forms and assessing the social and economic drivers of contemporary art. As we celebrate its 50th birthday, here are five key titles published through *October*, books that embody the journal's founding tenets, or point in new directions.

by Walker Downey



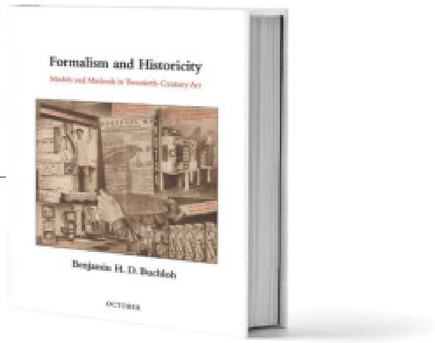
The Optical Unconscious

Rosalind E. Krauss founded *October* alongside Annette Michelson and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, and the journal can't be disentangled from her own work as a critic. Even before the term "postmodernism" first appeared in *October*, Krauss was engaged in a critique of modernism's claims of originality, appeals to the authority of the artist-creator, and blind faith in the purity and integrity of artistic mediums. *The Optical Unconscious* is Krauss's most captivating effort to dismantle modernism from within. For a taste, see her counter straightforward readings of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings *as paintings* by reminding us that they were born not on the wall but on the floor—in a state of abject horizontality and as receptacles for waste.


ON THE WINGS OF HYPOTHESIS
COLLECTED WRITINGS ON SOVIET CINEMA
Annette Michelson

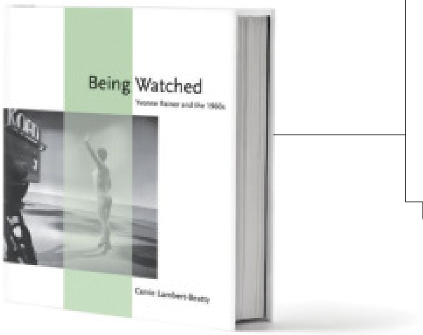
On the Wings of Hypothesis: Collected Writings on Soviet Cinema

October lay claim to film in its first issue, which explained that the journal was named after Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein's *October: Ten Days That Shook the World* (1928). *October*'s sustained dialogue with film owed a great deal to Annette Michelson, who is celebrated for her writings on Soviet cinema of the kind collected in this 2020 volume. Michelson explicates the ways in which filmmakers such as Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov regarded radical technical experimentation as suited to the advancement of revolutionary politics. Especially breathtaking is her 1972 essay on Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and its efforts toward social transformation through a "transformation of consciousness."


Formalism and Historicity
Models and Methods in Twentieth-Century Art
Benjamin H. D. Buchloh
OCTOBER

Formalism and Historicity: Models and Methods in Twentieth-Century Art

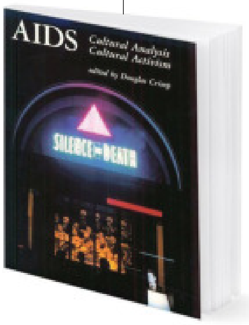
Of the figures most closely associated with *October*, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh has drawn most vigorously on the Marx-inflected tradition of "critical theory" (as practiced by Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, et al.) that sought to study cultural forms as crystallizations of socioeconomic tensions and contradictions. *Formalism and Historicity*, a 2015 anthology of Buchloh's writing, poses questions concerning the co-optation of the avant-garde by institutions, the market, and spectacle culture, and makes a case for the inseparability of form and politics. In one of his most inventive essays, Buchloh argues that Conceptual art's eschewal of visual substance in favor of linguistic presentations left it uniquely positioned to interrogate social institutions and their reduction of human experience to bloodless paper-pushing.



MUST READ

Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s

In 2010 Carrie Lambert-Beatty's monograph on dancer, choreographer, filmmaker, and writer Yvonne Rainer arrived as an essential model of interdisciplinary scholarship and an accessible entry point into the delirious hybridity of the 1960s. *Being Watched* offers a reframing of Rainer that understands her pared-down choreography in relation to her acute awareness of the body's ensnarement in a play of gazes. For Lambert-Beatty, Rainer's interest in the tension between her physical body and her body *as seen* connects her work in dance to her explorations in film, just as it implicates Minimalist sculpture's probing of embodied experience and the rise of mass-mediated spectatorship during an increasingly televised age.



AIDS: Cultural Analysis/ Cultural Activism

In 1987 Douglas Crimp helmed a special issue of *October* dedicated to the unfolding AIDS epidemic. A year later, his issue was reworked into a book that remains a bracing document of AIDS activism and an inflection point in the evolution of queer theory. Among the catalysts for the special issue was Crimp's involvement in the activist collective ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), which inspired a collection of texts that brokered an alliance between theoretical perspectives and activist energies. A vigorous expression of what Crimp called "mourning and militancy," this book stands alone in the early *October* canon in its direct engagement with identity politics.

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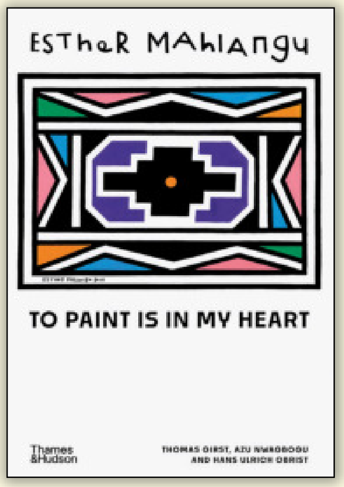
new books for spring


ESTheR MAhlAngu
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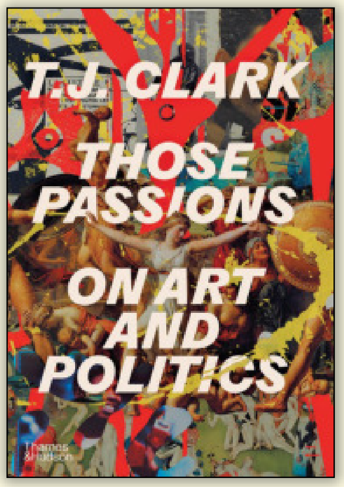
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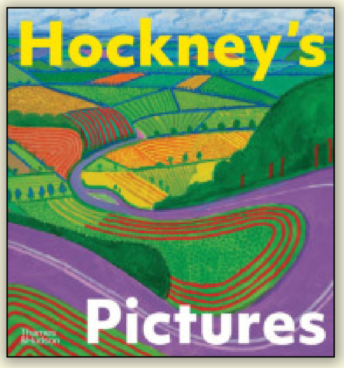
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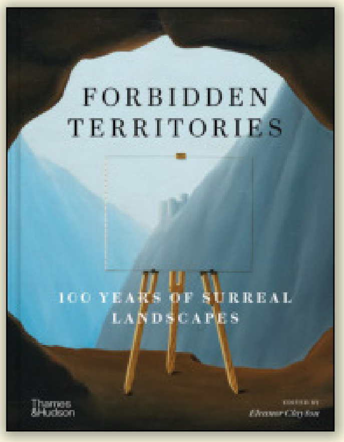
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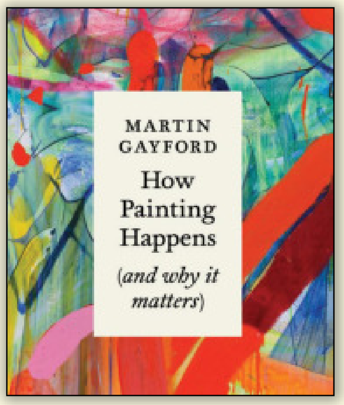
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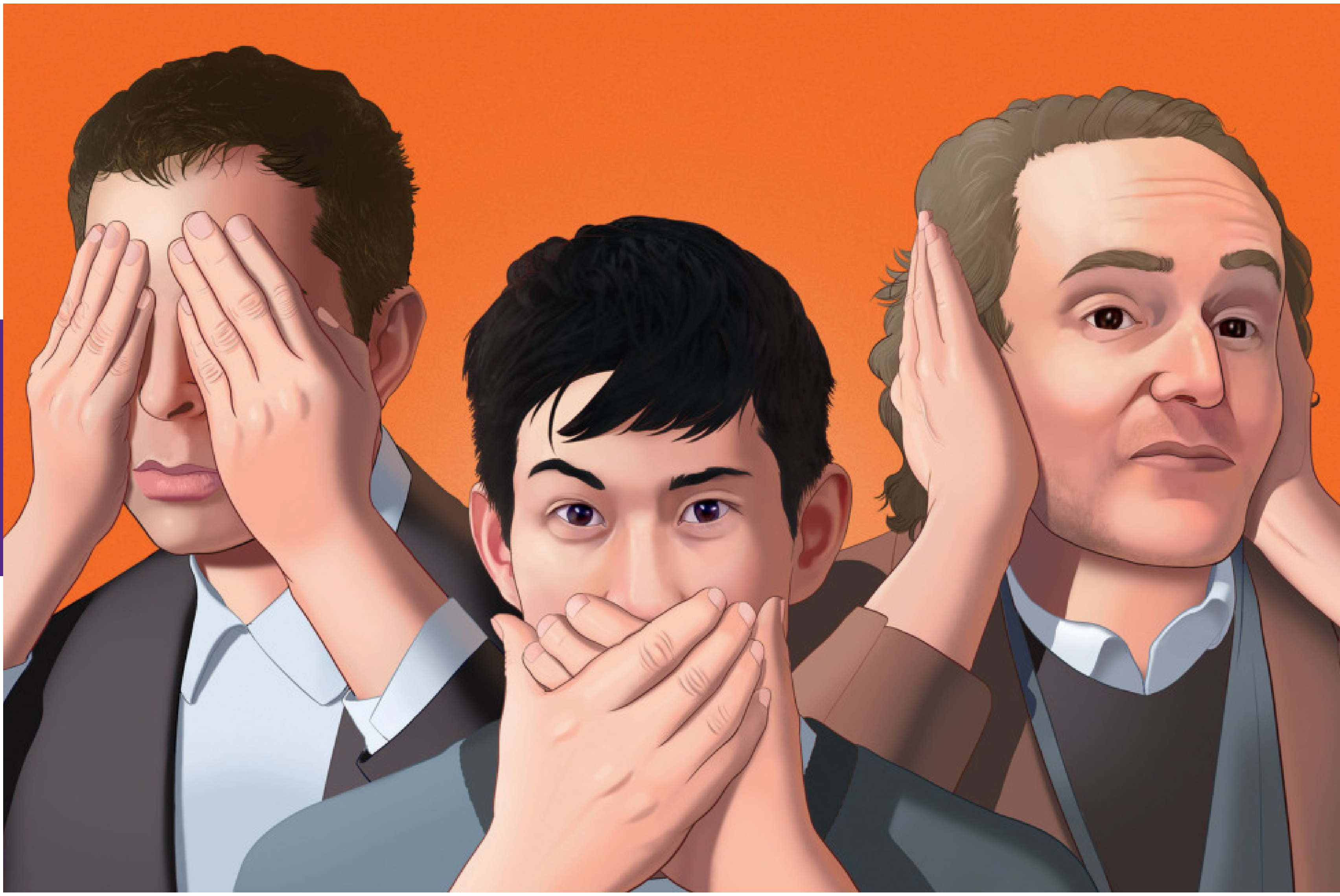


Left to right, art critics Jason Farago, Dean Kissick, and Sean Tatol.

Fatigue Chic

Is art criticism getting more conservative, or more burnt out?

by Louis Bury

As a critic myself, I get it. Most art exhibitions aren't amazing. I personally think about gallery-going the way I do thrifting, even though I don't buy art because it's much more expensive than used clothing. At both galleries and thrift stores, I like to poke around in hopes of being pleasantly surprised. Most of what's on display is, by definition, average: a pair of innocuous chinos; an abstract painting that would look nice above your couch. Some of it's a bit cringe, the art equivalent of a tuxedo T-shirt. And some is interesting but just not your size or style. Only at rare moments, often when the search feels futile, do you stumble upon something incredible: a jacket or a sculpture that feels as though it exists just for you, whose improbability makes the discovery that much more meaningful.

All of which is to say that I'm suspicious whenever other critics complain that most art – or most movies, or most music – is bad these days. Most days, most work isn't incredible. Combing through it all, fatigue is inevitable. But that fatigue causes

Illustrations by Daniel Garcia

some critics to mistake the rarity of aesthetic elation for a uniquely humdrum contemporary culture. One sign of this error is rampant nostalgia for the way things used to be – when the critic was younger, or else during an illustrious historical era.

This nostalgia pervades the work of several critics who’ve been grumbling that contemporary art is stagnant. Sean Tatol’s self-published *Manhattan Art Review* tosses off zesty negative reviews that stirred up productive interest in art criticism’s stakes throughout 2023. That same year, *New York Times* critic-at-large Jason Farago wrote the civilization-level version of a “kids these days” think piece, “Why Culture Has Come to a Standstill,” which argues that aesthetic style no longer advances and that perhaps “ours is the least innovative century for the arts in 500 years.” Dean Kissick’s polarizing 2024 *Harper’s* screed, “The Painted Protest,” vents frustration with the curatorial paradigm shifts resulting from 2010s identity politics, and romanticizes the pre-Trump art world of its author’s early adulthood.

Art *isn’t* what it used to be, in good and bad ways, but every generation experiences a version of this phenomenon as it ages. What stands out about these critical complaints is their frustration toward how the world itself has changed, often in ways hostile to artists. Today’s technological and economic conditions exert novel demands on US arts professionals, creating an industry where overwork and precarity are the norm. It’s no surprise that artists have adapted to these conditions and it’s no surprise, if a bit cliché, that some critics wonder if that means art’s best days are behind it.

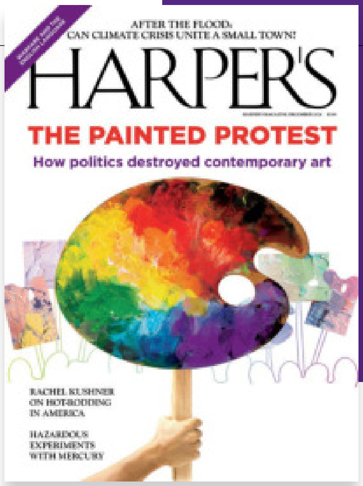
Farago’s “Why Culture Has Come to a Standstill” argues that Western culture’s best days have passed but that, once you accept the fact, you can have a more fulfilling relationship to what remains. The article asks “why cultural production no longer progresses in time as it once did,” and answers that phones and other digital tools create so much “chronological confusion” that the concept of aesthetic progress no longer makes sense. Instead, we have “a culture of an eternal present,” exemplified by Amy Winehouse’s hit 2006 album *Back to Black*, which sounds “neither new nor retro,” “as if it came from no particular era.”

The argument’s premises aren’t particularly objectionable; however, the conclusion Farago draws from them is silly. He contends that “the lexical possibilities of many traditional media are exhausted,” and thus no major stylistic innovations are possible within them. As a result, he believes audiences ought to let go of the lingering high modernist belief that “good art is good because it is innovative.” But you get the feeling Farago is less at peace with his cultural disappointments than he pretends, given that his subsequent reviews continue to dredge up examples of aesthetic stagnation, always linking back to this article.

Part of Farago’s complaint is that digital dissemination reduces art to mere content: “In the 20th century we were taught that cleaving ‘style’ from ‘content’ was a fallacy, but in the 21st century, content (that word!) has had its ultimate vengeance, as the sole component of culture that our machines can fully understand, transmit and monetize.” The digital revolution has had seismic implications for the production and distribution of culture, similar to that of the printing press centuries ago. So it’s bizarre – and laughably premature – to speculate, as Farago does, that “we are now almost a quarter of the way through what looks likely to go down in history as the least innovative, least transformative, least pioneering century for culture since the invention of the printing press.”

> Nostalgia for one’s youth à la Dean Kissick, or for the great eras in art history à la Jason Farago, might differ in content but not in form.

What’s actually happening is that culture as Farago knows and prefers it is changing as a result of techno-economic pressures. In recent decades, cultural platforms have undergone transformations even more dramatic than the content they showcase, with profound effects on how and why artists operate: from becoming content creators, to collaborating with AI. As a staff writer for the paper of record, at a time when such jobs are near-extinct and the term “paper of record” feels like an anachronism, Farago is aware of the changing status quo. He just chooses to cling to yesterday’s norms even as he pretends to let them go.



The cover of the December 2024 issue of *Harper’s Magazine*, featuring Dean Kissick’s cover story “The Painted Protest.”

Courtesy *Harper’s Magazine*, New York

Kissick, on the other hand, laments that his youthful optimism about art’s potential led to disappointment. Like Farago, Kissick believes contemporary art feels exhausted because it fixates on historically marginalized identities and folk knowledge, especially in major biennials. Also like Farago, he’s tired of how art relies on the same type of “spin-offs, remakes, quotations, interpolations, and revivals” omnipresent in the movie, music, and fashion industries. Unlike Farago, Kissick feels less willing to accept a diminished role for art.

When “The Painted Protest” was published in mid-November 2024, shortly after the United States presidential election, everyone had an opinion about it. The piece received recognition for articulating that a cultural moment has passed – the identity politics that predominated as “faith in the liberal order began to fall apart around 2016” – and it received criticism for its tendentiousness and misplaced romanticism. Kissick’s characterizations of 2010s cultural liberalism traffic in straw men and overstatements (art “amplify[ing]” historically marginalized voices “shouldn’t, it seemed, be inventive or interesting”). But his core argument captures how efforts at greater inclusivity in the fine arts shifted, over the past decade or so, from an institutional critique to the institutional norm. He asks, “When the world’s most influential, best-funded exhibitions are dedicated to amplifying marginalized voices, are those voices still marginalized?” And answers that the project of inclusion “has been completed,” even “hollowed out into a trope.”

This passage’s false dichotomy flattens nuances: a voice can be centered by cultural institutions yet remain politically or economically marginalized. But it puts a finger on why the 2020s anti-woke sentiment, though it often lapses into petty grievance, has had counter-hegemonic appeal not just to some arts audiences but also to a segment of the US electorate. These recent tugs-of-war over cultural power, which go back further than Kissick's article acknowledges, feel fraught not only because social media inflames conflict but also because there's so little actual power available to most participants, owing to unequally distributed resources.

Over the past half-century, US neoliberal austerity has exacerbated pressure on artists, curators, and arts writers, making institutional success feel increasingly zero-sum. At the same time that middle class creative and intellectual career paths have grown more precarious, the costs of housing, health care, and college have risen faster than wage growth. The art market, where idealistic press release rhetoric often runs cover for the machinations of extreme wealth, renders these material disparities conspicuous. For artists and culture workers without a financial safety net, these conditions discourage taking aesthetic or personal risks and encourage play-it-safe professionalism.

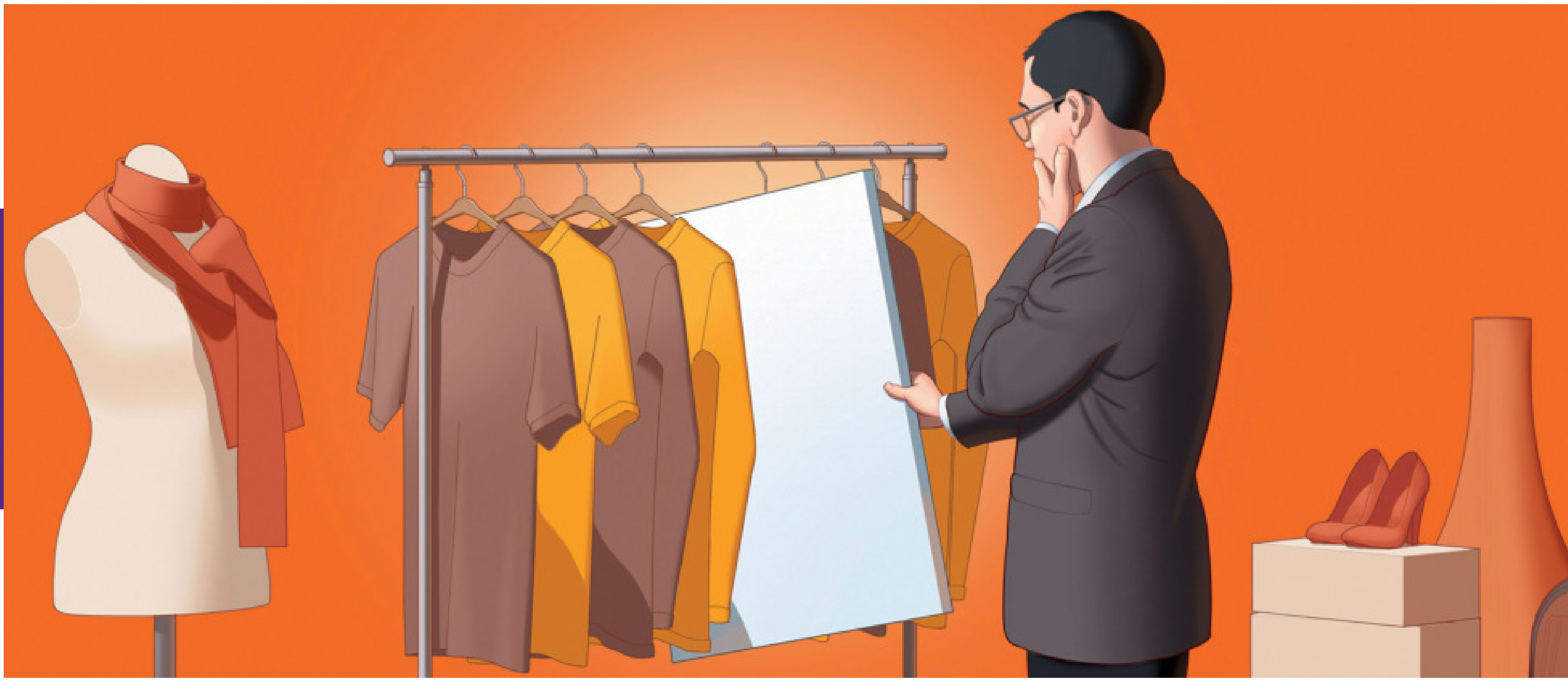
That's why, for all its controversy baiting, the most telling section of "The Painted Protest" is a head-scratching paean to mega-curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, also known as "Hurricane" HUO. Kissick interned for Obrist in 2008 and fondly recalls the latter's frenetic lifestyle: "He circumnavigated the world relentlessly, meeting everyone he could and introducing them to one another, in person or over email on his two BlackBerries, insisting on the urgency of their conversation." Obrist "almost destroyed himself," concludes Kissick, "as a committed early-twenty-first-century citizen should, in an orgy of connectivity." This rose-tinted portrayal feels jarring, given the extent to which Kissick romanticizes the transgressive bohemian freedom of a life in the arts. Yet Obrist's pathological overwork was the prototype for digital hustle culture, for the always-on professionalism that many in the arts today adopt out of financial necessity, a sense of self-importance, or both.

I stopped visiting thrift stores in my 30s, around the same time I started visiting art galleries routinely. In some ways, I substituted one hobby for another; both scratch a similar itch. The lifestyle change was also pragmatic: the more I wrote about art professionally, the less free time I had for other things, and thrifting is an inefficient way to build a wardrobe. In fact, to free up energy in my overscheduled life, I adopted a personal uniform for each season and social or professional occasion. This HUO-style life hack made my days more efficient but also made thrifting for unique items moot.

The physical exhaustion that Obrist normalized laid the groundwork for the aesthetic exhaustion these 2020s critics decry. Culture workers are conditioned to believe they can't get ahead, so they live frenetically, fueled by the fear that they're falling behind. There's more than a little truth to that belief. But it's worth considering the role that overstimulation and burnout plays in declaring so much work uninspiring. Most arts professionals are overworked and underpaid, and confronted, as on dating apps, with a buffet of cultural options whose sheer quantity dulls the luster of every individual possibility.

In this light, the recent curatorial vogue for artistic folk wisdom looks not just like an effort to center the historically marginalized, but also a longing for "simpler," less networked, times and places. Nostalgia for one's youth à la Kissick, or for the great eras in art history à la Farago, might differ in content but not in form. As Kissick puts it: "Everyone, it seems, wants to escape the present. We just long for different pasts."

I still long to be pleasantly surprised, but it gets harder as you get older. What would surprise me right now are critics who articulate positive visions of the art world they want to see, rather than grouse about what's dull or different. But those kinds of articles are harder to write, and receive less attention, than sensationalized negativity. Farago and Kissick, in those aforementioned articles, actually do include lists of their contemporary aesthetic pleasures; Tatol, too, consistently reviews exhibitions he loves (though there are fewer of them than ones he hates). The bright spots in these critics' fields of vision contravene their gloomy theses about art's exhaustion. Incredible work still happens, about as often as it always has; our jobs and our phones are creating new obstacles, as well as new opportunities, to make and find it. ●



Protecting the Medicines

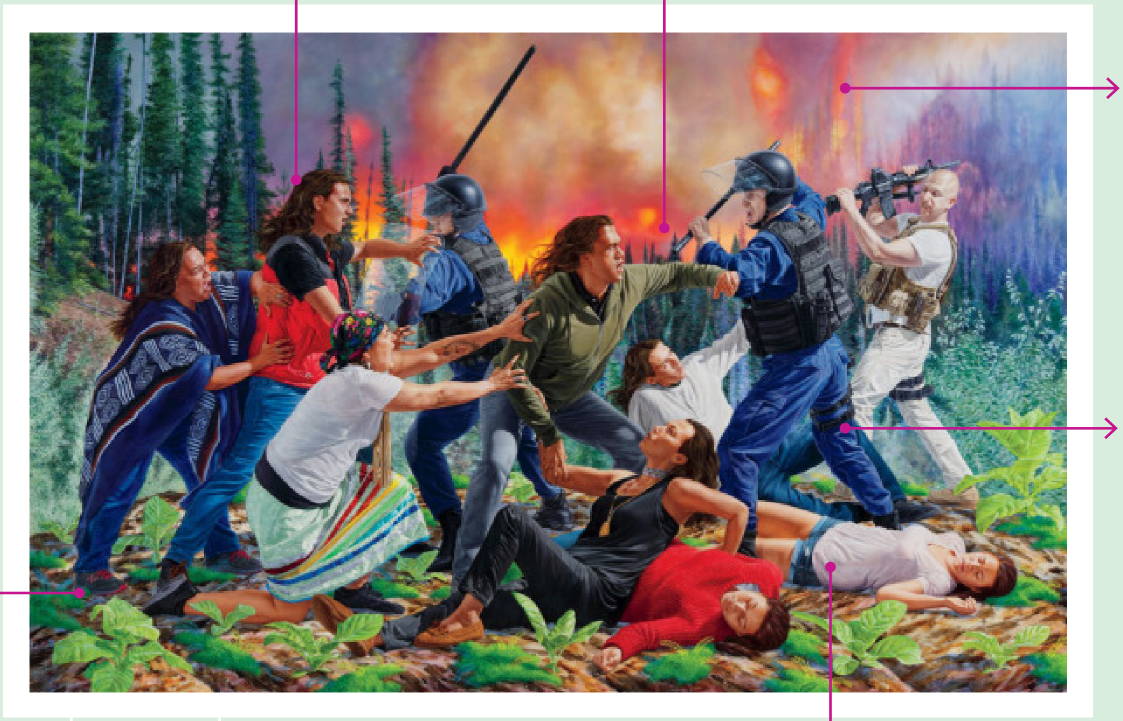
“History is Painted by the Victors” at the Denver Art Museum features 41 monumental works by Cree artist Kent Monkman that confront the canon of Western and American art history by focusing on stories and scenes significant to Indigenous people. *Protecting the Medicines* (2023), which highlights the efforts of Indigenous protesters fighting for basic resources such as water and land, will be on view in the show opening April 20.

“I’ve spent a lot of time looking at art made by settlers,” Monkman told *Art in America*. “A lot of it conveyed a mandate to dispossess and erase Indigenous people—from view, from the continent. I try to communicate the depth and vastness of our perspectives that were never communicated.”

This painting is part of a series started after grassroots protests broke out in 2016 against an oil pipeline that could have adverse effects on the Standing Rock Indian reservation between North and South Dakota. “I wanted to honor activists who are standing up,” Monkman said. “They are heroes for protecting the land for future generations.”

Battle scenes depicted by Poussin, Benjamin West, Rubens, and Goya serve as inspiration for Monkman, who finds them “ripe for intervention to populate with indigenous perspectives, characters, narratives, and themes that put us back into land that was stolen.”

Tobacco is a plant that Indigenous people have used in sacred ceremonies commemorating life transitions such as birth, nuptials, and funerals. It can also be used to ask permission and forgiveness, as well as to give thanks. It can smudge negative energy and, when smoked, signal a peace agreement.



Fire was added to the landscape “to speak to the urgency of the environmental devastation.”

“I wanted the non-Indigenous people to look like cops or hired private security, like those at Standing Rock who suppressed the people protesting.”

In this large-scale canvas, measuring around 7-by-10-feet, Monkman is “taking cues to learn from the Old Masters” while also painting concerns of “the present as a viable way to talk about history and our contemporary lived experiences.”

“There is this constellation of knowledge in our ways of knowing that the rest of the world would benefit from paying attention to. We’re at a critical turning point where Indigenous perspectives are more important than ever.”

“I wanted people to wear their regular day-to-day clothes as everyday Indigenous people,” Monkman said. “I just asked, ‘If they were going to a protest or a blockade, what would they wear?’”

©Kent Monkman

— Interview by Francesca Aton

Ithell Colquhoun's Mystical Truths

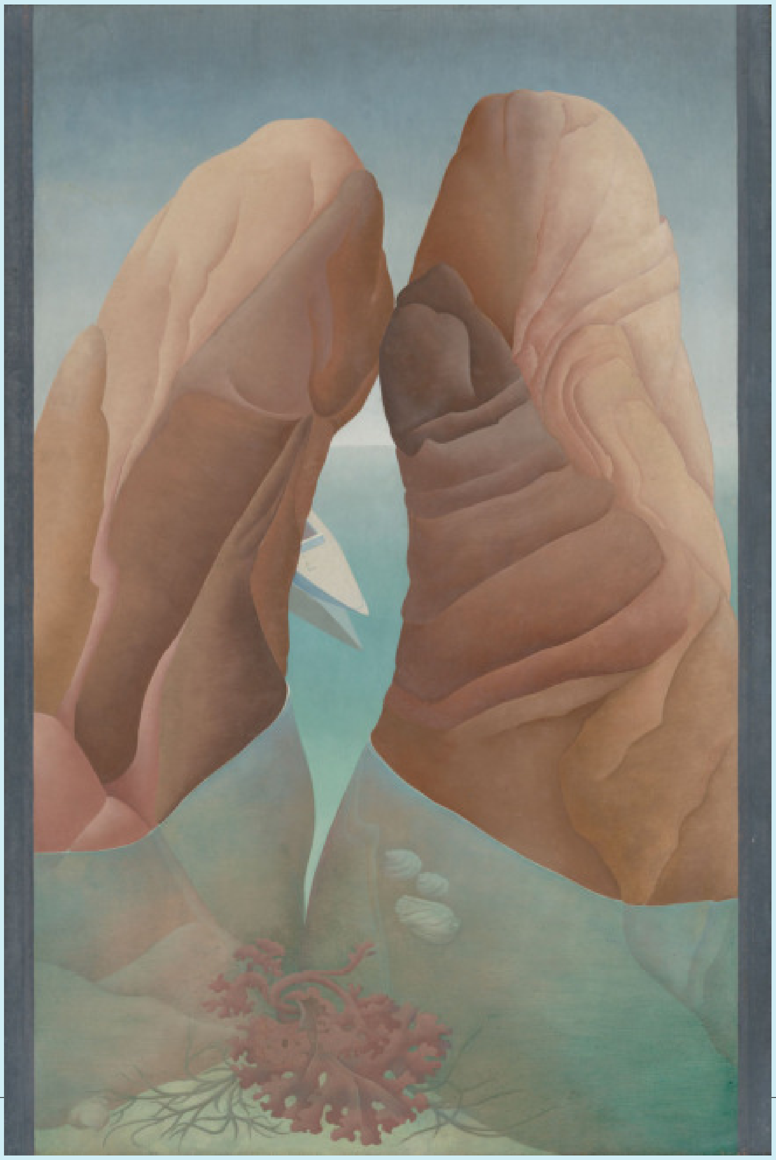
The British Surrealist sought enlightenment from beyond the mortal realm.

by Eliza Goodpasture

Like all interesting people, Ithell Colquhoun was a mass of contradictions. She was obsessed with sex but uninterested in romantic relationships. She was radical in her art but fundamentally traditional in many aspects of her life. She was an occultist and spiritualist, but she never committed to any one system of belief. She is best remembered for her involvement in British Surrealism, but that period was short-lived. Her life's work was expansive and deeply mystical. It remains completely bizarre, and completely hypnotic decades down the line.

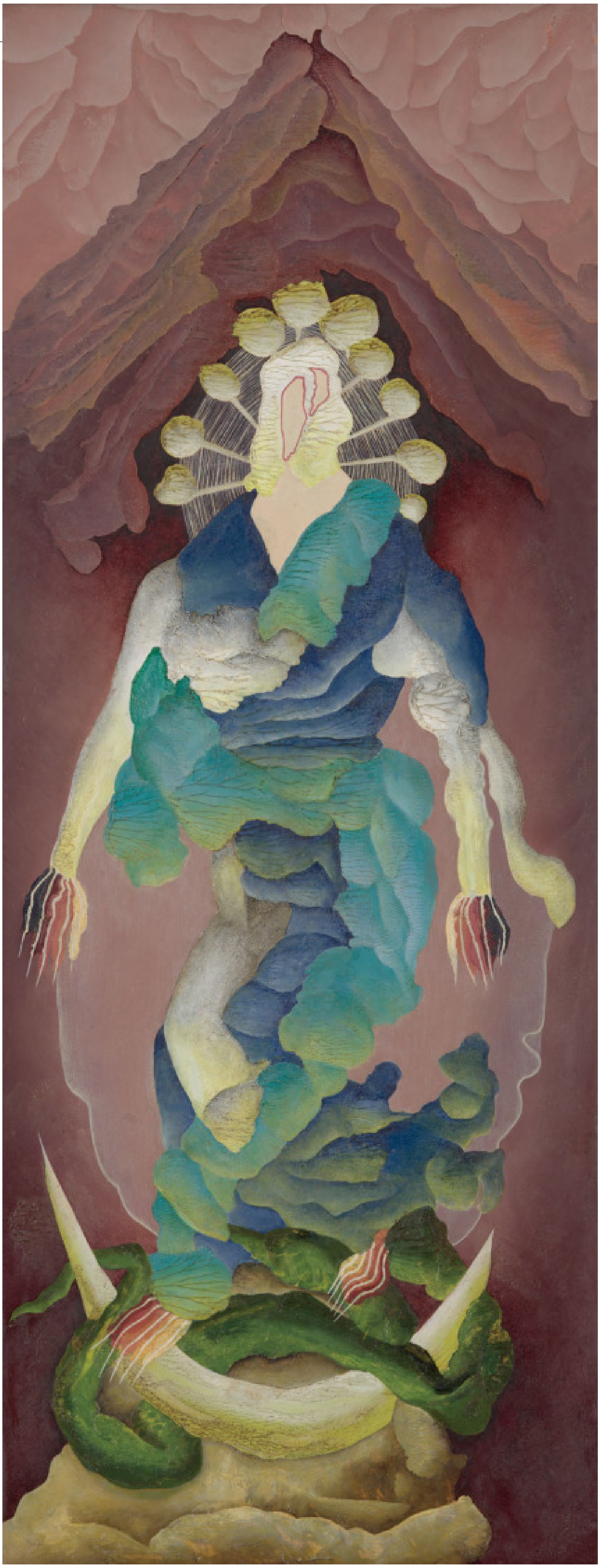
Margaret Ithell Colquhoun – the subject of a major exhibition at Tate St Ives featuring more than 200 works and archival materials related to her life and career – was born in India in 1906, into a white British family that had lived and worked in the British colonial administration in India for generations. It was a strange start: not especially unusual among a certain category of the British middle classes at the height of Britain's imperial age, but still strange in that it left her uncertain about where she belonged. Ithell grew up in England, mostly away from her parents, but retained a strong affinity for India. She never knew quite where to place her heritage: she felt that she deserved an Indian identity, but she understood that she was not Indian. She never really felt English either. Her understanding of herself was a product of the convoluted power structures of colonial Britain. In her unpublished autobiography *Until Twelve*, she wrote "Where am I, between east and west? A lost soul indeed."

That liminality led Colquhoun on a lifelong quest for enlightenment. She wasn't really concerned with finding a sense of belonging in the mortal realm, however – she wanted to transcend it. Colquhoun was a Perennialist, and as such she believed that all the belief systems on earth were leading to the same ultimate truth, and were based in the same ancient myths and wisdom. Her slightly chaotic pinballing from one magical society to another throughout her life reflects this fundamental principle.



Ithell Colquhoun: *Scylla (méditerranée)*, 1938.

From top: Photo Reg Speller/Fox Photos/Hulton Archive via Getty; ©Spire Healthcare/©Noise Abatement Society/©Samaritans



Attributes of the Moon, 1947.

It is possible to trace many of the strands of belief that comprise Colquhoun's tapestry of a worldview, as Amy Hale did in her excellent 2020 biography *Ithell Colquhoun: Genius of the Fern-Loved Gully*. Hale calls the artist a "nexus of all the major occult currents of the twentieth century." Colquhoun rejected any existing way of seeing the world in search of one that felt truer. As she made her way through a century that became defined by its loss of faith, she grappled with the challenge of how to create meaning without the authority of a governing religious system. Her guiding principles have long stymied viewers of her work, particularly art historians who have turned up their noses at the idea that she might actually have believed all the stuff that she talked about.

Rising interest in occult-minded artists – the "Shamanic turn," as Hale calls it – has created space for artists, many of them women, who previously did not fit into existing narratives of art history. As figures like Hilma af Klint, Leonora Carrington, and Emma Kunz have emerged from obscurity, the previously hidden relevance of spirituality has been noted in the lives of others, from Piet Mondrian to Agnes Martin. The esoteric will never sit completely comfortably in the mainstream, because that's the point of it: to be unusual, bizarre, absurd. But it is undeniably a strong current in 19th- and 20th-century art. With the Tate show, which travels from St Ives to Tate Britain in June, Colquhoun is the next artist to finally get her due.

Colquhoun first saw the innovative work of the French Surrealists in 1936, and it had a profoundly rupturing effect on her painting as well as her writing, which included novels, memoirs, nonfiction, and poetry that was Surrealist in nature. Going from the staid post-Impressionism of her artistic education at London's Slade School of Fine Art to a world of dreams, magic, and the uncanny opened a door. She was a member of the British Surrealist group from the late 1930s to 1940, but quickly left (or was pushed out), due partly to her interest in occultism and partly to the group's general listlessness and controlling leader, E.L.T. Mesens. But Colquhoun continued to claim the Surrealist mantle throughout her career, even though the movement never took root in Britain the way it had in Paris.

She was briefly married to Toni del Renzio, a fellow Surrealist reject. Their marriage was rocky, and Colquhoun never had a long-term relationship thereafter. Her art, however, demonstrates her powerful interest in the erotic and intimate. She painted sexually disturbed scenes, including some evoking castration, as well as explicit depictions of penetrative sex and more romantic scenes of nude male and female figures entwined.

In *Scylla* (1938), which is in Tate's collection and has become one of Colquhoun's best-known works, two rocky outcroppings rise out of water, a large growth of coral under the water between them, the prow of a boat floating toward it. The rocks are very phallic, with fleshy tones and skin-like wrinkles. But the scene is also easily read as a woman's view of her own body in the bath, with crinkly knees rising from the water and a curly bush between her legs. The approaching boat lends a narrative, and it is hard *not* to read it sexually. Is it an approaching hand, a penis, or – referencing the Greek myth in the title – a party of men to devour?

Some of Colquhoun's most striking paintings are even more explicitly vulvar, like *Attributes of the Moon* (1947) and *Alcove I* (1946). They imagine female anatomy as a landscape, using a flat, tight style to evoke an erotic dreamscape. It's easy to compare them to Georgia O'Keeffe's genitalia-esque flowers, but Colquhoun's work is much more aggressive. Her interest in the clitoris, which is always clearly articulated, makes these works more than just sensual: they suggest pleasure, play, deviance, and voyeurism.

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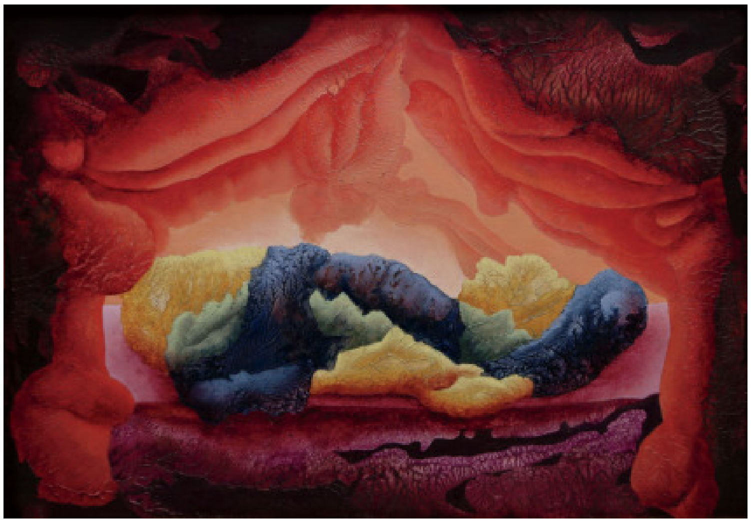


Alcove I, 1946.

This body of work refuses a clear biographical reading as well as an obvious feminist one. Colquhoun's goal was liberation, but not just from the patriarchy: she wanted to be free of all earthly concerns. Androgyny, or a union between male and female on a divine plane, was one of the paths she saw to enlightenment. Her tight, knotty paintings of male and female bodies overlapping evoke her desire for the genders to be united – though she sometimes painted two bodies of the same sex, reflecting her own ambiguous queerness. Her intense focus on biology also reflects a sense of essentialism that goes beyond just erotic and gendered bodies. She was after essential truths, and believed that people, places, and things had power and resonance that were inherent to their role in the universe.

Colquhoun began living part-time in Cornwall, a rugged and remote coastal county in the southwest of England, in 1947, eventually moving there full-time in the late '50s. She was drawn to the region's Celtic legacy, finding in it an amalgamation of the attractions of Eastern spirituality and British ethnicity. The Cornwall that Colquhoun inhabited was constructed in the English imagination in the 19th century as "other" and exotic, at the very moment that its mining economy was collapsing and the English government was centralizing control over the region.

Celtic identity was fraught in Britain, adopted and embellished by English Protestants to reflect an idealized romantic past for the British Isles, while also claimed by groups who had a different (and arguably stronger) claim to indigeneity and marginality, like the Cornish, Scottish, and Irish. Colquhoun lived rustically in Cornwall, in a cabin with no electricity or plumbing, but she long maintained a flat in London to which she could escape when the discomforts of such living grew too great. When she finally moved permanently to Cornwall, she lived in a much more comfortable home. She had the attitude of many wealthy urbanites who seek the simple life, romanticizing it, and never fully committing to its inconveniences.

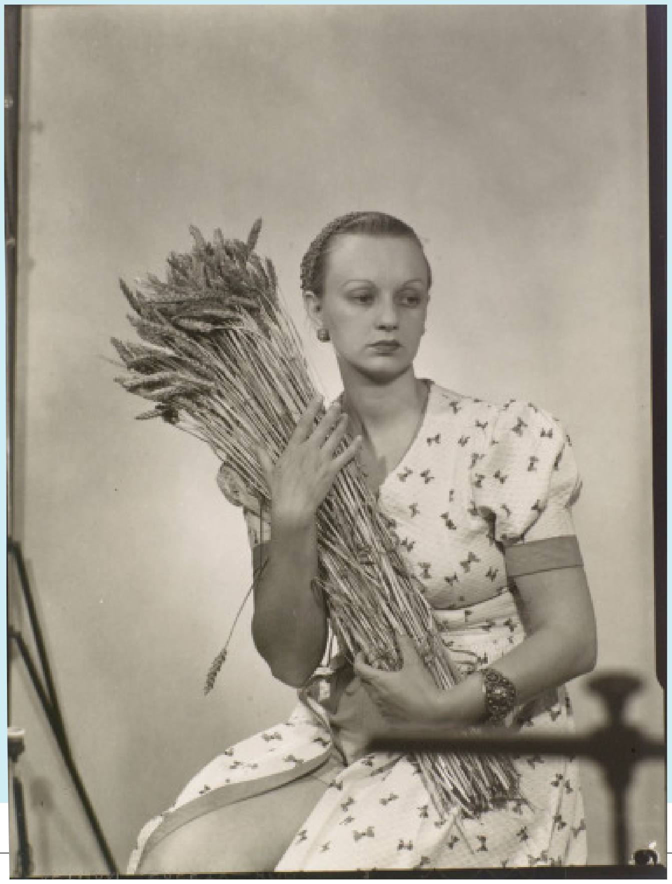
Throughout her time in Cornwall, Colquhoun was especially mesmerized by ancient monuments and stones. She included them in her work in various ways, such as in *Landscape with Antiquities (Lamorna)* (1950), which depicts an imagined bird's-eye view of the land around her home in the Cornish village of Lamorna dotted with shapes like stone circles and neolithic monuments. Some of them have rippling lines expanding outward, representing their energy fields – an idea she explored more imaginatively in her slightly earlier work *Dance of the Nine Opals* (1942), which also depicts a stone circle creating an intense aura of energy and magic.

The Perennialism that drove Colquhoun's occultism as well as her desire for rustic living eventually overlapped significantly with Traditionalism, an anti-modern 20th-century philosophy. As she aged, Colquhoun's commitment to ancient wisdom and magic expanded to include a distaste for and distrust of modernity. She had a conservative attitude to progress, believing that the path to enlightenment lay in ancient magic, not in anything the future, or even the present, could offer. She lived to see a revival of interest in Surrealism in the 1970s, but she was still not given the focused attention her work deserved. She died in 1988 in Cornwall, leaving her estate to the National Trust with the intention that it be sold to acquire and preserve wild land in Cornwall. That final choice encapsulates Colquhoun's lack of interest in earthly fame.

The simultaneously backward-looking and radical nature of Colquhoun's work has made it difficult to categorize and challenging to parse – but, at the same time, magnetic in its uniqueness. While she did touch one of the 20th century's major art movements, Colquhoun was not driven by trends or even by the art world at all. She was relentlessly idiosyncratic and true to herself. ●

+ Against the Grain

In the 1930s, Colquhoun was photographed by Surrealist visionary Man Ray holding a bundle of wheat in tribute to Demeter, the ancient goddess of agriculture, fertility, and the earth. A few years earlier, in 1928, Colquhoun evoked the same figure in *Demeter and Persephone*, a painting of the goddess and her daughter in a loving embrace after the latter was abducted and made queen of the underworld.



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Kent Monkman (Fisher River Cree Nation), *The Great Mystery* (detail), 2022. Acrylic paint on canvas, 117 ½ × 91 ½ in. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire; Purchased through the Miriam H. and S. Sidney Stoneman Acquisition Fund. © and image courtesy of Kent Monkman.

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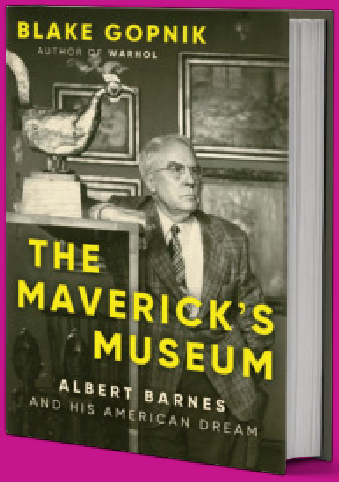
Cantankerous Collector

A new biography of Albert Barnes shows how the collector's bold vision was distinctly American.

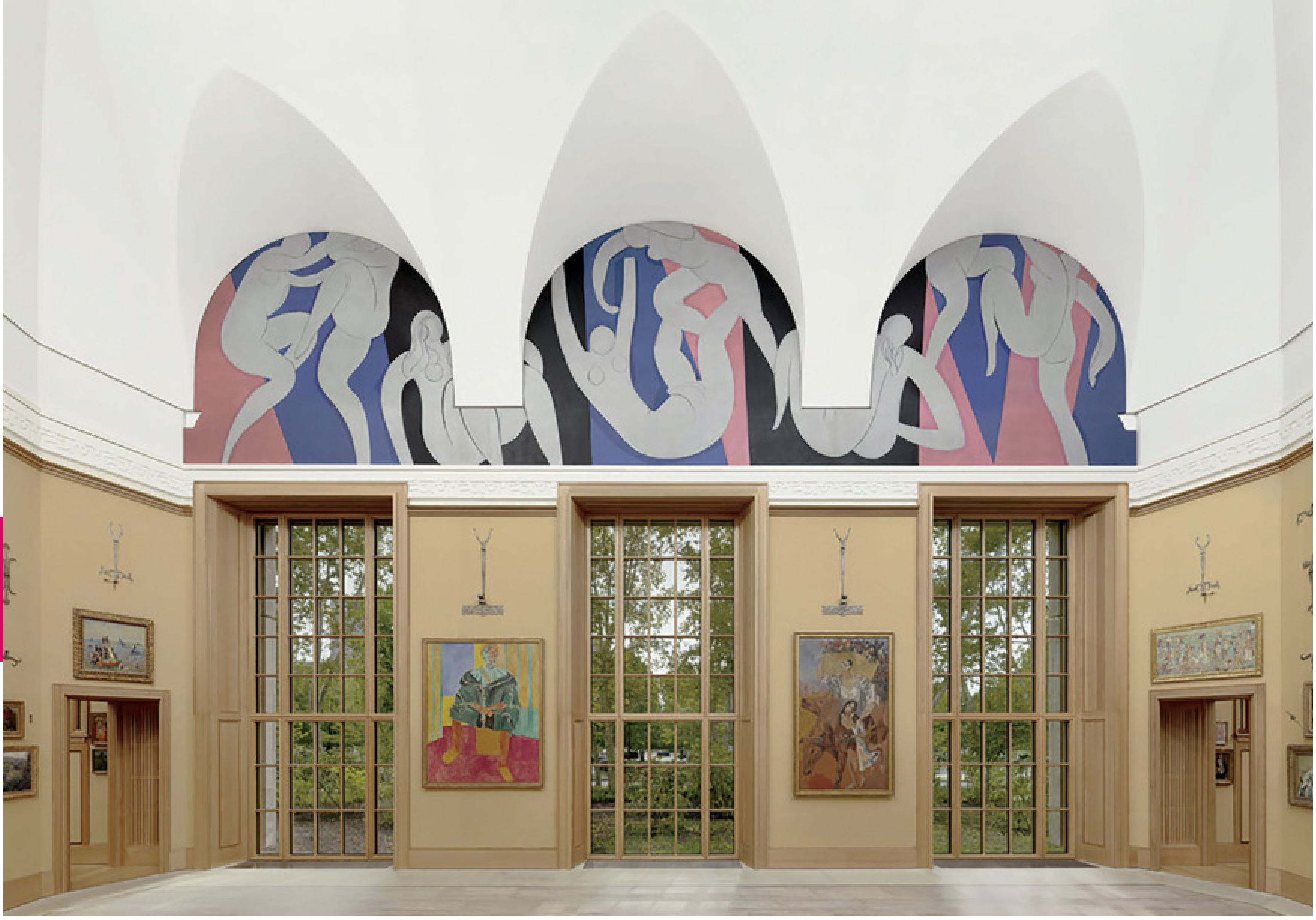
by Kelly Presutti



The Maverick's Museum: Albert Barnes and His American Dream, by Blake Gopnik, New York, Ecco, 2024, 416 pages.

The dream of teaching: take students to a museum, put them in front of a great work of art, have them describe what they see, and in so doing, discover that greatness for themselves. Rarely, many a museum educator will share, is this what happens. We arrive before the work of art riddled with biases, assumptions, presumed knowledge, and conditioned patterns of viewing, all of which make it tremendously difficult to see what is right in front of us.

This is the problem Albert Barnes was contending with when he founded his museum and educational institute in Marion, Pennsylvania, in 1922. The baggage visitors



View of Henri Matisse's three-panel painting *The Dance* (top), 1932–33, at the Barnes Foundation.

From top: Courtesy Ecco, New York; ©Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

brought to the art in his collection included a conservative resistance to the avant-garde, yes, but even more than that, they brought with them the widespread racism of early 20th-century America.

Today, the Barnes Collection is best known for its lush Renoirs and joyous Matisse mural; Barnes acquired his collection at a time when Monet still looked radical to most Americans. But he was also one of the earliest United States collectors to exhibit African objects as art. And famously, he took a formalist approach to displaying his collection, selecting and grouping works not by chronology or context but by visual elements like color and shape.

At the Barnes Collection, relocated to a new building in downtown Philadelphia in 2012 against its founder's wishes, these "ensembles," as the foundation calls his groupings of artworks, have been meticulously re-created. The arrangement provides one of the most singular experiences of art viewing in museums today, juxtaposing work made in distinct eras, places, and media. In theory, such an approach would de-hierarchize a historically elitist field and welcome new makers and modes of representation.

In his new biography of Barnes, Blake Gopnik foregrounds this democratic ethos, focusing specifically on the philanthropist's contributions to building racial equality—despite Barnes's notoriously cantankerous personality and his tendency toward invective and slur. Barnes's support for Black culture extended beyond his collection. He made a point of hiring African American workers for his factory and paying them a fair wage, invested in the Black magazine *Opportunity*, and eventually partnered in his foundation with the historically Black Lincoln University.

Gopnik opens his book, *The Maverick's* *Museum: Albert Barnes and His American Dream*, at a 1924 banquet at the Civic Club in Harlem. The event is often invoked as one of the founding moments in the Harlem Renaissance, gathering together more than 100 writers, publishers, and editors, from the renowned intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois to the young poet Gwendolyn Bennett. The guest list deliberately included white supporters of Black creativity; Barnes was in attendance. Gopnik describes the arrival in an indigo-blue Packard sedan of "an ox of a man in a double-breasted greatcoat and fedora." Barnes loved to make an entrance, and he thrilled at being one of the few white attendees able to speak to the aesthetic qualities of African art.

Not just speak to, but show off, as he declared: "I have in my house ample proof in the works of these moderns that much of their inspiration came from ancient [Black] art." This overture may come as a surprise to those readers who know Barnes for his widely beloved collection of French painting. I suspect part of Gopnik's goal is to produce such surprise, to make us see Barnes in a new way.

But the move also speaks to the role African art played in French modernism, from Picasso's Cubist forms to Modigliani's masklike portraits. And it underscores how difficult it is to chart those always asymmetrical relationships between the African artists who inspired and the European artists who appropriated them.

View of the east wall in room 16 at the Barnes Foundation, soon after it moved to Philadelphia in 2012.

American inventor and art collector Dr. Albert C. Barnes, 1930.

From top: Photo Tim Nighswander/©The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia; Photo APIC via Getty

Barnes saw himself as "elevating" what were often ritualistic objects to the status of "art," but theorists like Walter Mignolo point out how this kind of thinking still relies on a hierarchy bound up with the explicit and implied violence of coloniality. Many of the African objects European artists were exposed to were stolen or looted, their very presence in Europe made possible by way of an imperial infrastructure of transit.

Gopnik does not try to absolve his subject from the prevailing prejudices of his time; he admits Barnes was operating, using 21st-century parlance, with a "white-savior complex," that Barnes cast African cultures as primitive, and also manipulated support for Black communities in pursuit of his own ends. Barnes, for example, balked at a proposal for the construction of 126 small houses adjacent to his foundation in Merion that he saw as detracting from his stately property, and made threats to discourage the zoning commission.

In navigating Barnes's approach to African art, Gopnik relies heavily on the scholarship of Alison Boyd, author of a dissertation on Barnes and the director of research and interpretation at the Barnes Collection. Boyd argues that though Barnes appreciated African art, he was ultimately unable to see it as modern. Boyd's appointment is an example of the Foundation's willingness to question its founder's legacy, as is their recent commission of a film by Isaac Julien. To celebrate the institution's centennial in 2022, an exhibition debuted Julien's five-screen installation *Once Again … (Statues Never Die)*; the work was also included in last year's Whitney Biennial. The film stages a conversation between Barnes and the quintessential Harlem Renaissance philosopher Alain Locke, the exchange based on actual correspondence between the two men. Speaking in the museum's galleries, both meditate on the role African culture played in the history of art, and the ways art might champion African identity.

The film also deals with the ethics of holding African objects in Western museums at all. It includes views of the Pitt Rivers Museum, a notorious repository of looted objects (some recently returned). Julien draws connections between the violence of the past and artmaking in the present. In the film, we see the 20th-century African American sculptor Richmond Barthé at work on Black sculptural bodies in an atelier filled with neoclassical plaster casts; Barthé's sculptures were exhibited as part of Julien's installation. A song cowritten and performed by Alice Smith layered throughout the film speaks to restitution not as a question of righting past wrongs but of restoring future possibilities. Ultimately, Julien leaves open the matter of how museums might reckon with their often fraught inheritance.

The Barnes who features in Julien's film shares much with the character Gopnik offers, not least his strident tone and seeming inability to listen. When he could have been comfortable enough to relax and enjoy his collection, he remained restless and argumentative. Barnes, a chemist, made his fortune with a new formulation for an antiseptic that became widespread in treating gonorrhea. He developed that product, Argyrol, with his business partner, chemist Herman Hille. The two later parted ways, in part because Hille (accurately) accused Barnes of bribing doctors to plug their products.

Gopnik recounts numerous spats between Barnes and his sometimes friends, entertaining episodes that leave the reader feeling a sense of tedium with a man who seems to work constantly against his own best interests. It is relevant to Gopnik's story about a "maverick's" pursuit of the American dream that Barnes was born poor, that he had to fight for what he wanted from the start, and that he carried throughout his life a sense of his status as an outsider despite his growing fortune.

> Though Barnes appreciated African art, he was ultimately unable to see it as modern.

One friend Barnes seems never to have strayed from was the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey. The two met when Barnes took Dewey's graduate seminar at Columbia in 1917 and maintained a friendship for 35 years. Dewey's progressive approach to education provided the basis for the educational program Barnes developed, bolstering Barnes's own interest in creating a democratic environment for learning. The philosopher dedicated his 1934 book *Art as Experience* to Barnes, suggesting the relationship was to some degree reciprocal, though the $5,000-a-year stipend Barnes arranged for Dewey likely helped.

Barnes first tested Dewey's pedagogical ideas on his factory workers, engaging them in weekly seminars to look at art and discuss philosophical texts. Once he established his foundation, Barnes initially hoped those workers who had become most interested in his art would be the guides to the collection: Those few burgeoning art lovers "will take the others of our workers into the Foundation a couple of times a week and each will describe his own honest reactions to what he sees." Rather than a top-down approach to art education, the "Barnes Method" relied on individual self-determination, making the museum, in its founder's words, "nothing but a place where people can see for themselves."

Barnes elaborated his method in thousands of published pages and trained select appointees to teach it. And yet, Barnes seemed rarely to have appreciated what anyone else saw in his collection. Reputedly, he hovered behind visitors and ejected them from the museum if they said something he didn't like—this, assuming they were admitted at all. Barnes required interested parties to write to request admission, and many aspiring admirers were refused. Gopnik cites a critic who described the rigorous admissions process: "There are formalities to be undergone, records to be looked into. The Pope, sitting on his throne in the Vatican, is much less careful for his most holy toe than is Dr. Albert Barnes for his hundred and twenty Renoirs and his two and forty Soutines."

The stakes were high for Barnes. His ultimate goal was not to cultivate a world of art lovers. He had in mind something much grander: the making of a richer and fuller American life. That he saw art as the path to a better world is admirable; that he controlled the interpretation and experience of that art so rigidly, less so. Regardless, his work is testament to a belief that would seem quaint, if it didn't also seem so desperately necessary—that art, in Gopnik's words, can "do real work in the world." If only those in power would let it. ●

Two views of Isaac Julien's installation *Once Again . . . (Statues Never Die)*, 2022, at the Barnes Foundation.

Photos Henrik Kam/Courtesy The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia (2)

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Alan S. Maltz:
Historic Sand Key Lighthouse, 6 by 9 inches.

Something Old, Something New: How the Florida Keys Art Scene Continues to Find Inspiration in the Past

Nance Frank, lifelong Key West resident and founder of the legacy Gallery on Greene, leans in, conspiracy in her voice. “It’s my day off,” she says, “and the rest of my week is murder.”

Alan S. Maltz:
Eternity Road, 6 by 9 inches.

It’s high season for the arts in the Florida Keys, with artists and visitors arriving daily from around the United States and abroad. Frank, in her various professional and civic roles, has spent her life heralding the Keys’ unique culture, championing locals like Peter Vey and Suzie Zuzek De Poo and Cuban artists including Manuel Mendive and Mabel Poblet.

Vey, whose celebrated work was selected three times for the US Department of State’s Art in Embassies program, opens his exhibition “Painter of Paradise” at Gallery on Greene on February 15. The collection of 30 new works features heritage Key West homes rendered in relief through his mastery of the palette knife. “There’s enough texture to where you want to stick your finger in and lick it,” Frank says. A recent acquisition of multiple Zuzek De Poo collections provides the unique opportunity for

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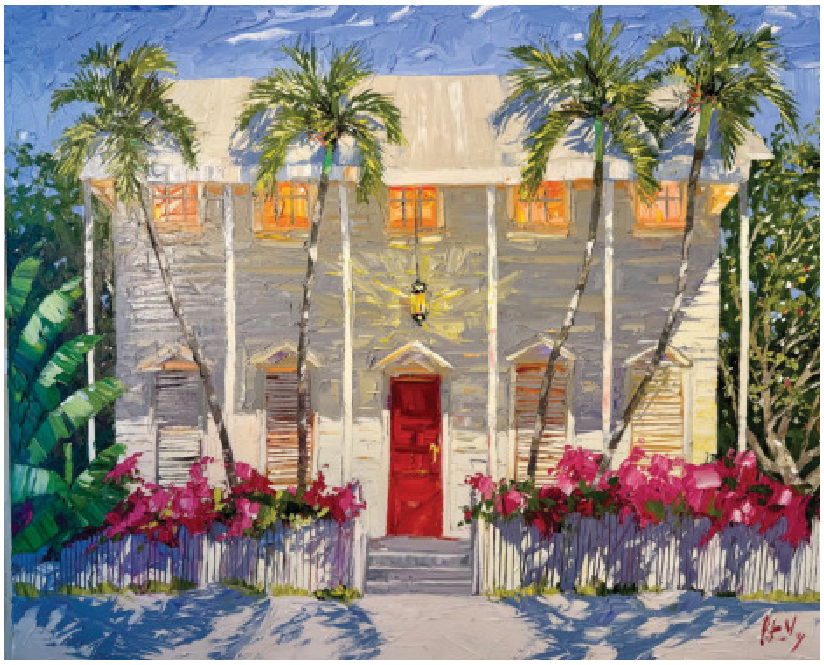


Peter Vey:
Red Door, 2024, oil on Belgian linen, 40 by 50 inches.

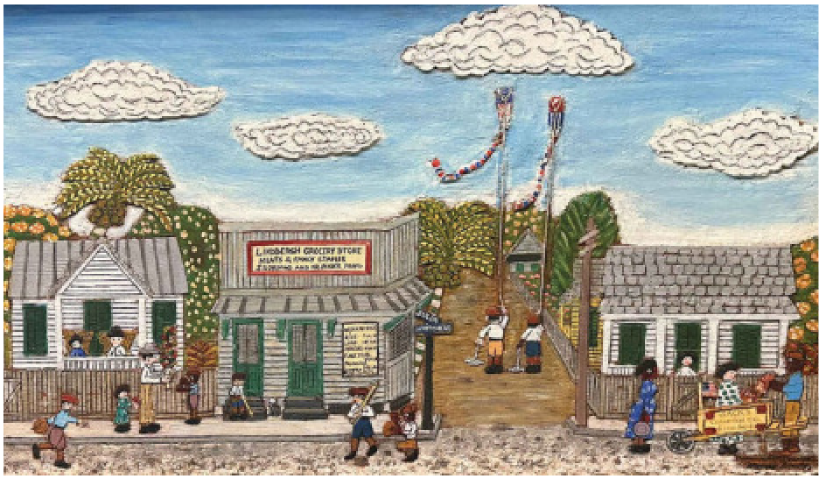
"Continual Elegance of Innocence," which opened March 1 and features approximately 30 porcelain tiles and boxes from the late folk artist, who died in 2011. Frank describes the work simply: "She had the hand. No one had to tell her anything."

Every year, Frank guides small groups and individual tours to Cuba, ushering art lovers into some of the most exclusive studios on the island, including those of longtime clients Mendive and Poblet. While the neighboring The Studios of Key West will host Poblet's exhibition, Gallery on Greene will augment with after-hours events throughout the monthlong stand. "In Key West, we're always having a party," she says, laughing.

At The Studios, Poblet's first exhibition with the organization is a long time coming. A onetime visiting artist as part of its Peyton Evans Artist Residency (PEAR) program, her 2022 installation *High Tide* has grown in stature to become a destination for Keys visitors. "It's taken on a life of its own," executive director Jed Dodds says.

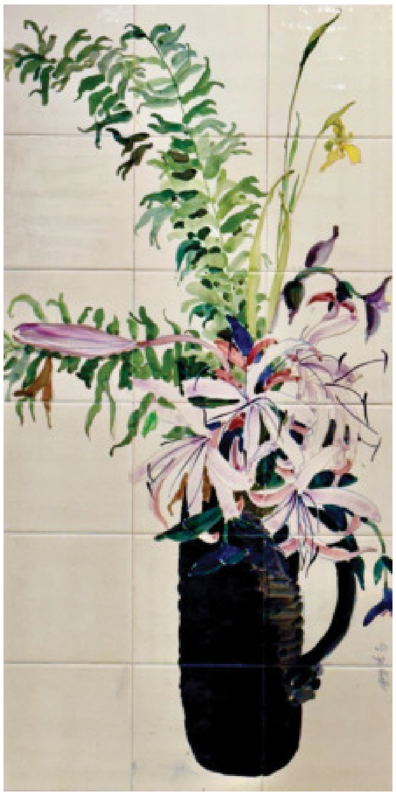
Poblet's self-titled show, which opened February 6, represents the apotheosis of the pipeline Dodds and his staff have built. Through the PEAR program, relaunched in 2024 following the renovation of an 1880s-built Victorian guesthouse, visiting artists spend a month in Key West creating and interacting with the community, both enriching it and being enriched by the culture. "Our core philosophy is to provide opportunities to artists to do what they do, and then let the results flow from there," Dodds says. "The relationship with Mabel is special, but that's the goal."

Some events, however, have greater meaning given their deep connection to the history of Key West. Duke Riley's project *Trading with the Enemy*, which ran through January 30 at The Studios, was produced in the Keys more than a decade ago, when the artist trained a flock of pigeons in Key West before releasing them in Cuba to traverse the 90 miles back home. Half of the birds carried Cohiba cigars secured



Mario Sanchez:
Francisco Marrero & Villace, 16 by 28 inches.

in harnesses, and the other half documented the journey with specially modified cameras. The footage—edited and presented alongside the harnesses and the artist's custom-built coop—are evidence of an ambitious imagination, while nodding to the community's smuggler past. “We have a unique relationship with the Caribbean and Cuba,” Dodd says. “[*Trading*] plays differently here than it would anywhere else.”



Suzie Zuzek De Poo:
Beach Lillies, 36 by 18 inches.

While the Keys art community continues to grow, Crozier, an industry leader in fine arts storage and transportation, with a facility in Ft. Lauderdale, will open in Tampa in March. This represents both an acknowledgment of the region's present and a belief in its future.

“These are some of the fastest growing cities in the nation,” says James Hendy, Crozier's SVP and General Manager. “It made a lot of sense for us to be there, and we're really excited with the opportunity to open.”

Hendy, who spent a career in fine arts auctions before joining Crozier two years ago, says that the days of two men and a truck are long gone. The modern collector or museum curator needs specialization of both equipment and manpower, assiduous temperature and humidity control for collections, and a worldwide network of locations. Crozier, a pioneer in the transportation and storage space, has famously met this demand, and its Tampa property blends its trademark climate control and security with a state-of-the-art viewing room in which to examine works or receive potential buyers. Easy-access loading docks are specially designed to accommodate the dimensions of today's oversize artworks, reducing risk of damage between building and truck and back again.

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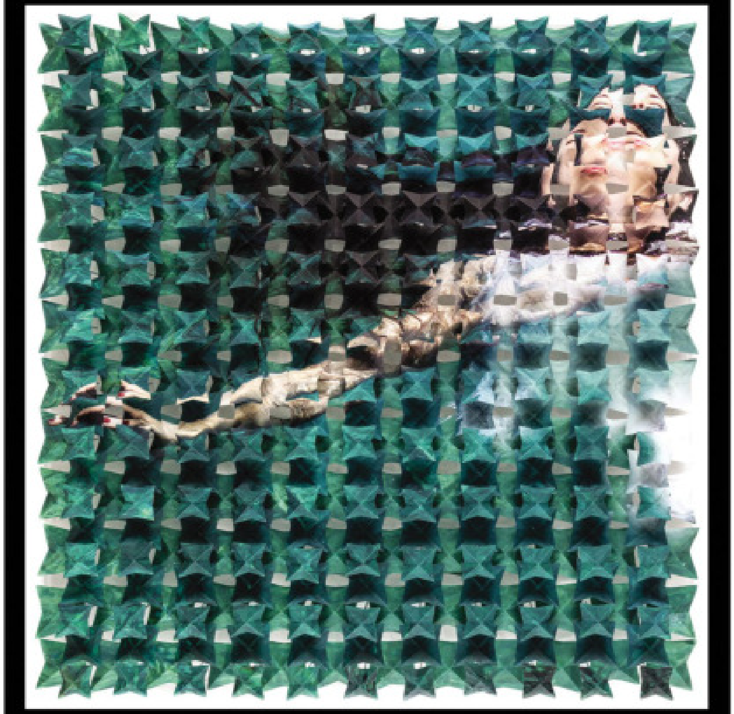
Bicentennial Americana #14, 18.5” x 30”, Intaglio
MABEL POBLET



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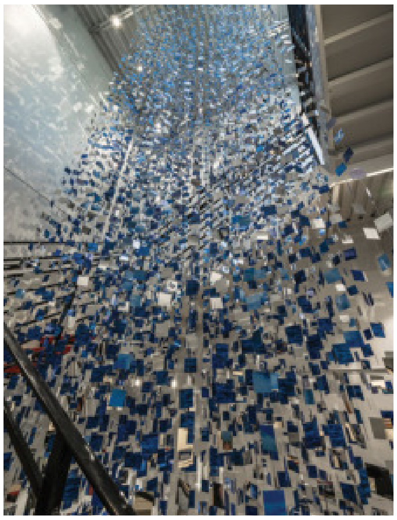
The PEAR House Courtyard, where Residency Artists gather. Photo by Tamara Alvarez.



Mabel Poblet: *High Tide*, 2022, printed acrylic, mirror, and monofilament.

“Florida is a wealth powerhouse, and a number of our clients have a need for us to be locally based so that they can manage, change, and move their collections both domestically and internationally from one location,” Hendy says. Now having two locations in South Florida just expands our network.”

Expansion is a key value for Elizabeth Young, executive director of the Florida Keys Council of the Arts. Under her leadership in 2024, the group expanded the 81-mile Florida Keys Sculpture Trail, which now includes 15 pieces from Key Largo to Key West. She’s also seen the rebirth of indoor performance arts throughout the Keys following the Covid crisis, with the Key West Theater hosting national acts in 2025 that include the writer Garrison Keillor, comedians Nick Swardson and Kevin Nealon, and songwriter Melissa Etheridge. “What I see is a return to theaters and indoor venues, which I find very rewarding,” she says.

A spirit of innovation and exploration has further expanded offerings, Young continues, thanks in part to transplants from all over the US. From the Fringe Theater Key West company to the Marathon Community Theatre’s popular Drag Queen Bingo and the rotating cast of chefs dropping by Williams Hall’s Unity Table series, there’s always something new to check out. “There’s a lot of energy—new things being tried,” she says.

But even with a new breeze in the air, the Keys themselves enchant

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visitors year after year because of their timelessness. Photographer Alan S. Maltz has found inspiration in its vistas for almost 50 years. He spent six months this past year photographing the sunset from the same location daily, an exercise, he says, that taught the famously unrestrained artist "to be persistent, to be consistent, and to expect the unexpected." His "Solar Series," as he's titled it, is part of a collection of 200 images to be released in early spring.

Maltz has also started the year with a complete redesign of his website, which allows longtime fans to browse a digital gallery of more than 4,700 images, organized by theme, and available for purchase on demand, printed in-house on a variety of mediums. While he may be best-known for his Keys wildlife photos and sea- and landscapes, the digital gallery presents the many eras and subjects in which Maltz has worked, including New York nightscapes from the early 1980s, Moroccan portraiture, and European street photography. "Everything is timeless," he says, seeing a through line across decades, formats, and locales. "It felt not that different from the way I feel now."

With his sixth book, *Old Florida*, nearing completion, Maltz admits he'll be grateful to see the longtime labor of love in his hands. All that's left to do is add a few words on selected images. But that doesn't mean that if the right scene catches his eye, maybe one he's seen a hundred times before but never in this evening's light, one more might end up in the book. "It's always possible until it's not possible," he says. "That's worked for me ever since I started."

Crozier art handlers removing a fragile vase from a specialized crate.

Crozier art handlers maneuvering an exquisite artwork.

The Writing Is on the Wall

With texts like “Sick Woman Theory” and *How to Tell When We Will Die*, Johanna Hedva expands what it means to be alive.

by Emily McDermott

self-portrait by Johanna Hedva

Photo Johanna Hedva

A self-portrait from Johanna Hedva's series "Crab and Moon," 2025, featuring a custom-made gown by ACBY.

"No matter how it arrives, disability *will* arrive for everyone, sooner or later," Johanna Hedva writes in *How to Tell When We Will Die: On Pain, Disability, and Doom*, an essay collection published this past fall. Assembling texts written over the past decade, the 368-page tome makes clear that sickness, in its many forms, is an inherent part of life – and that rather than aiming to "be well," understanding real "health" leads to embracing and caring for everything that accompanies this indisputable fact.

Like the genre-bending span of Hedva's creative practice as a poet, writer, musician, performer, and visual artist, *How to Tell When We Will Die* examines life and death from a multitude of perspectives, opening up new pathways of thought and posing questions related to everything from disability and anti-racist activism to Greek tragedies, ancient astrology, mysticism, kink, and doom metal. And the book is only part of the story: Beyond it lie two novels, numerous conceptual and musical performances, poetry, two albums, essays about other artists, and installations, drawings, and more. Connecting them all is Hedva's embrace of the vastness of the world, the uncontainable nature of the human experience, and the sickness, doom, and death that inevitably accompany life.

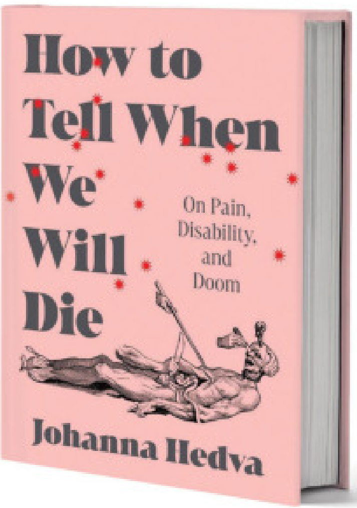
Hedva was born and raised near Los Angeles. Their parents, they say, were "'failed artists' in the sense that they had big ambitions, dreams, and aspirations and a huge amount of creativity and talent." Their mother was a painter with a studio in the garage, their father, a musician who practiced with a band almost every night, but neither figured out "how to live it every day in a way that was sustainable."

As a child, Hedva's creativity was encouraged. One day, around age 14 – the same age they came out – Hedva went to school in a self-made gown with a train and objects sewn on it, carrying an umbrella as an accessory. But there were also traumas owing to physical violence, poverty, and neglect, and intergenerational traumas related to their grandparents' immigration from Korea to the United States. At 16, Hedva's father kicked them out of the house. "I left a few days after my mother punched me in the head," they write in *How to Tell When We Will Die*. "My dad noticed the bruise the next day and, in his typical manner of not really being a father, suggested that I be the one to leave."

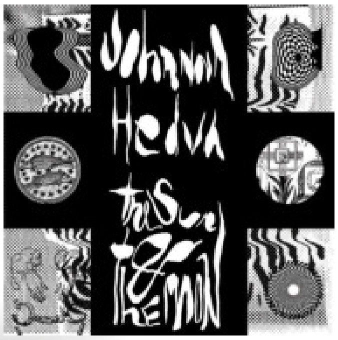
Hedva graduated from high school two years early, and by age 18, after a period of being unhoused, moved into a room of their own. During this time, they took a job at a leftist weekly newspaper, which they now recall as their first education in writing. Hedva wrote about anything and everything – "even Sarah McLachlan concerts," they said, with a laugh – and learned how to express strong opinions through writing. "It was a good experience because it was low-stakes, and I got published a lot right out of the gate," they said. They prefer to keep the details vague, however: "Hopefully none of this is available, even for the intrepid."

A scene from Hedva's play *Motherload*, 2012, from the series "The Greek Cycle," 2012–15.

Courtesy Johanna Hedva



Hedva's 2024 book *How to Tell When We Will Die: On Pain, Disability, and Doom.*


Johanna Hedva
The Sun and the Moon

Their 2019 album *The Sun and the Moon.*

Writing has always underpinned Hedva's practice. When we spoke during the promotion for *How to Tell When We Will Die*, they explained that they have written at least 500 words a day for 20 years. In *Minerva the Miscarriage of the Brain* (2020), a collection of poems, essays, and photographs and text related to performances, Hedva wrote, "I write as soon as I wake, but it is through writing that I fully awaken."

For Hedva, the practice of writing developed in their 20s, in tandem with performative works. *The Cave* (2012–14), for example, was a series of three performances, each involving Hedva and another performer telling stories that revolved around themes of feminism and death, with a healthy dose of humor, in intimate spaces. Around the same time, Hedva also created "The Greek Cycle" (2012–15), four plays they directed and wrote by adapting ancient Greek texts by Euripides and Homer. Each text was reimagined from a feminist and queer perspective, and the plays were performed in different settings in Los Angeles: a hallway at CalArts (where Hedva completed an MFA and MA), a Honda Odyssey, an art space, and a studio apartment in MacArthur Park.

Allusions to ancient Greek culture recur throughout Hedva's work. There's a section dedicated to the concept of hubris in *How to Tell When We Will Die*, and throughout all their work, Hedva namedrops Persephone, Nemesis, Zeus, and Hermes, among others, like the specific type of celebrities they are. "I'm fascinated with Ancient Greece, and it's not out of reverence," Hedva told me. "It's because I think all our problems were invented there." Xenophobia and the notion of women as slaves trace back to ancient Greece, they said, and continued: "I do not want to hear ancient Athens is the birthplace of democracy. No one could vote except propertied, head-of-household men. They moved society from a matriarchy to a patriarchy. They also took ancient Arabic, Babylonian, Sumerian, Indian, and Persian astrology and consolidated it. When you're studying ancient Greek astrology, you're studying a colonial project."

Hedva performing during their exhibition "God Is an Asphyxiating Black Sauce," 2020, at Klosterruine, Berlin.

Top left: Courtesy Hillman Grad Books, Los Angeles; Top right: Graphic Mark Allen; Bottom: Photo Salka Tiziana/Courtesy Klosterruine, Berlin

Detail of an object from Hedva's installation *The Clock Is Always Wrong*, 2022, at Gropius Bau, Berlin.

Performances like those in "The Greek Cycle" are chronicled in *Minerva the Miscarriage of the Brain*, which also reflects on the artist's real-life experiences of having a miscarriage, getting divorced, going through a breakdown during which they stopped speaking and wore earplugs and stayed in bed for two months, and being involuntarily hospitalized. As evidenced throughout their work, the personal is political, and so too is the private. And though the majority of Hedva's performances took place in contained spaces, they were, like stage plays, labor-intensive endeavors, often with two shows a night for three weeks. At a certain point, this became unsustainable: "I physically couldn't do it," Hedva said.

In the mid-2010s, Hedva veered away from performances and put more energy into publishing and work related to music and sound. In 2016, in *Mask Magazine*, they published "Sick Woman Theory" an essay that reframes disability as not only a biological state but also an inherently social and political condition – one that is enmeshed with what might be called viruses plaguing the world, like capitalism, racism, and sexism. The essay, about a subject Hedva hadn't previously confronted in their work, was reposted all over the internet, translated into 11 languages, and became a core part of the artist's practice.

Two years later, Hedva published their first novel, *On Hell* (2018), an experimental book delving into themes of despair, resistance, and the liminal spaces between life and death as well as fragmented consciousness and collective trauma. Then came an album, *The Sun and the Moon* (2019), and Hedva's first solo exhibition, "God Is an Asphyxiating Black Sauce," at Klosterruine Berlin, a preserved site of ruins of a 13th-century monastery, in 2020.

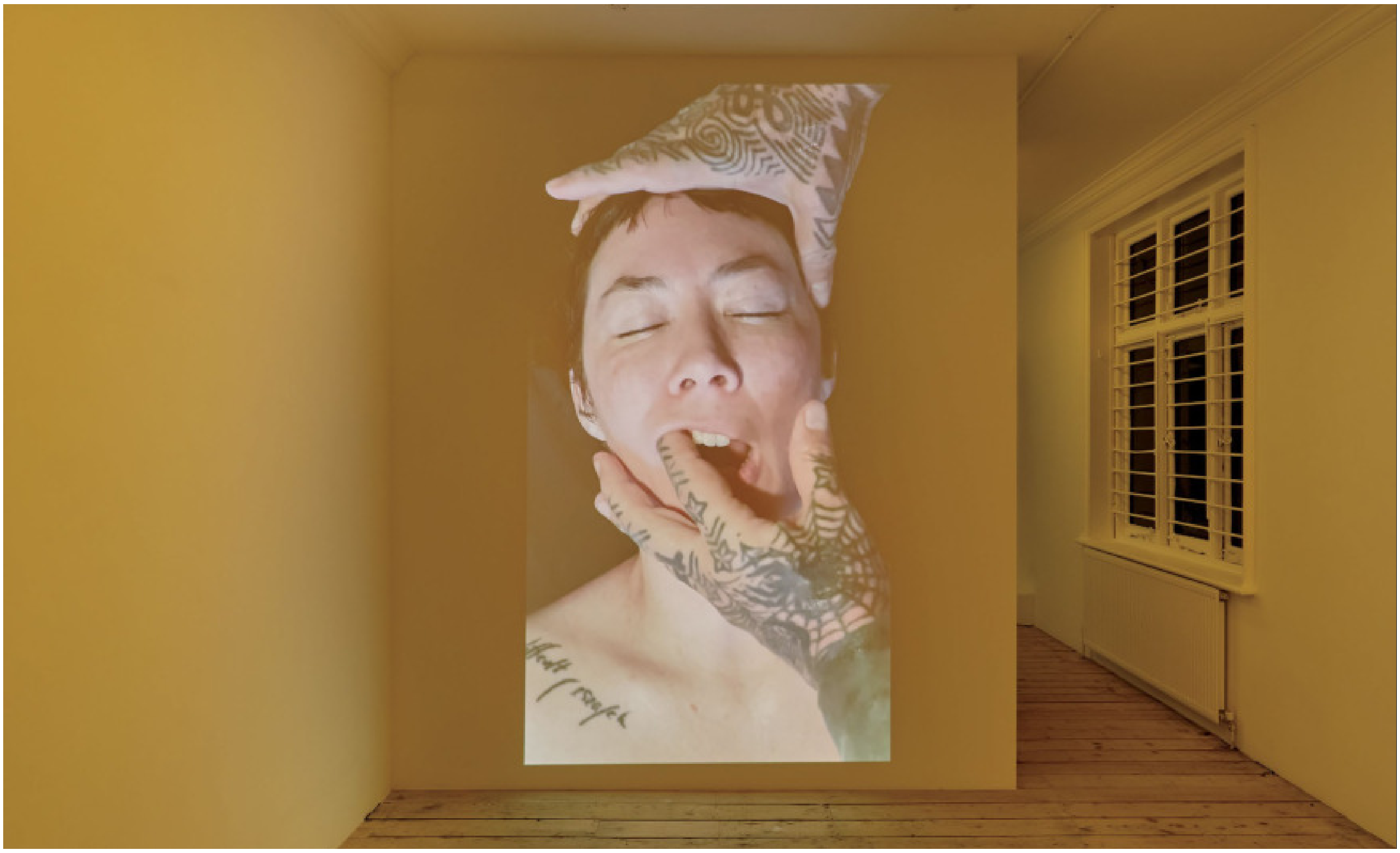
The show revolved around "Playlist to the Void," comprising songs from their album, readings from *Minerva the Miscarriage of the Brain*, new tracks created by four other composers, and then-unreleased songs from their 2021 album, *Black Moon Lilith in Pisces in the 4th House*. All of this coalesced in a soundscape of noise, language, and experimental music that could be experienced at the open-air site or streamed online, where all the audio was also described for Deaf listeners. "Making an exhibition during COVID-19 meant that my primary concern was access," the artist told *Art in America* at the time. "I was thinking about how the work could exist in multiple forms, pushing against the ableist notion that art is best experienced in person."

During this time, Hedva read Fred Moten's 2013 essay "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)" and Leila Taylor's 2019 book *Darkly: Black History and America's Gothic Soul*, two pieces that "changed everything about how I think," they said. "It was the first time I had really thought about blackness – the racial kind of political ethnic identity of blackness and the culture and the meanings around it – as well as nothingness and black as this negation of a color, the politics of negation, which is different than refusal." Combining these influences with their own experience, Hedva began to circle around darkness, black, death, holes, and trauma. To the present day, they told me, "Black permeates everything I do. I'm sort of like: annihilation, obliteration, nothingness, negation, entropy, the end."

As exemplified through their performances and writings, Hedva was staunchly "anti-object" for decades. "I took a militant position against the enmeshment of art and capitalism, and I saw this primarily happening in the making of expensive collectibles

A self-portrait of Hedva from the series "Egg," 2025.

From top: Courtesy Gropius Bau, Berlin; Photo Johanna Hedva



View of Hedva's exhibition "Genital Discomfort," showing *All Fear Is Erotic (with Ron Athey)*, 2024, at TINA, London.

for the ultra-wealthy to be trafficked and displayed by art institutions," they once said.

That mindset shifted, however, when Hedva was invited to engage with the Wellcome Collection – a museum and library in London devoted to items "relating to health, medicine, and human experience," according to its website – for a group exhibition held in 2022 at Gropius Bau in Berlin. Searching through the Wellcome Collection's holdings, Hedva found a 15th-century papyrus scroll on which researchers discovered traces of ink, egg, plants, vaginal fluid, and blood, leading them to determine that the scroll had been placed over a medieval woman in labor as a form of protection.

To showcase the finding in the exhibition – titled "YOYI! Care, Repair, Heal" and focused on "the politics of health" and "various concepts of care, repair, and healing" – Hedva and the curator worked with conservators to display the scroll in a vitrine with certain temperature requirements and limits on lighting. "All of these conditions had to be met for the object to be shown, and I had this moment of, 'Oh, objects are like bodies: they deteriorate, they need care, they need support,'" they told me, "and, even then, they're going to disintegrate eventually."

Inspired by the experience, Hedva also made a new body of work, *The Clock Is Always Wrong* (2022), featuring kinetic sculptural objects, textile prints, graphic drawings, text, and audio, each of which acted as a kind of clock made with time-telling materials such as honey, ink, hair, and mold. At Gropius Bau, black goo dripped from a handblown hourglass counting down specifically to the end of the exhibition. A series of abstract drawings, or studies of materials, made of ink, watercolor, glue, rainwater, metallic dust, and the artist's own saliva and hair were also attached to the wall with 22 knives.

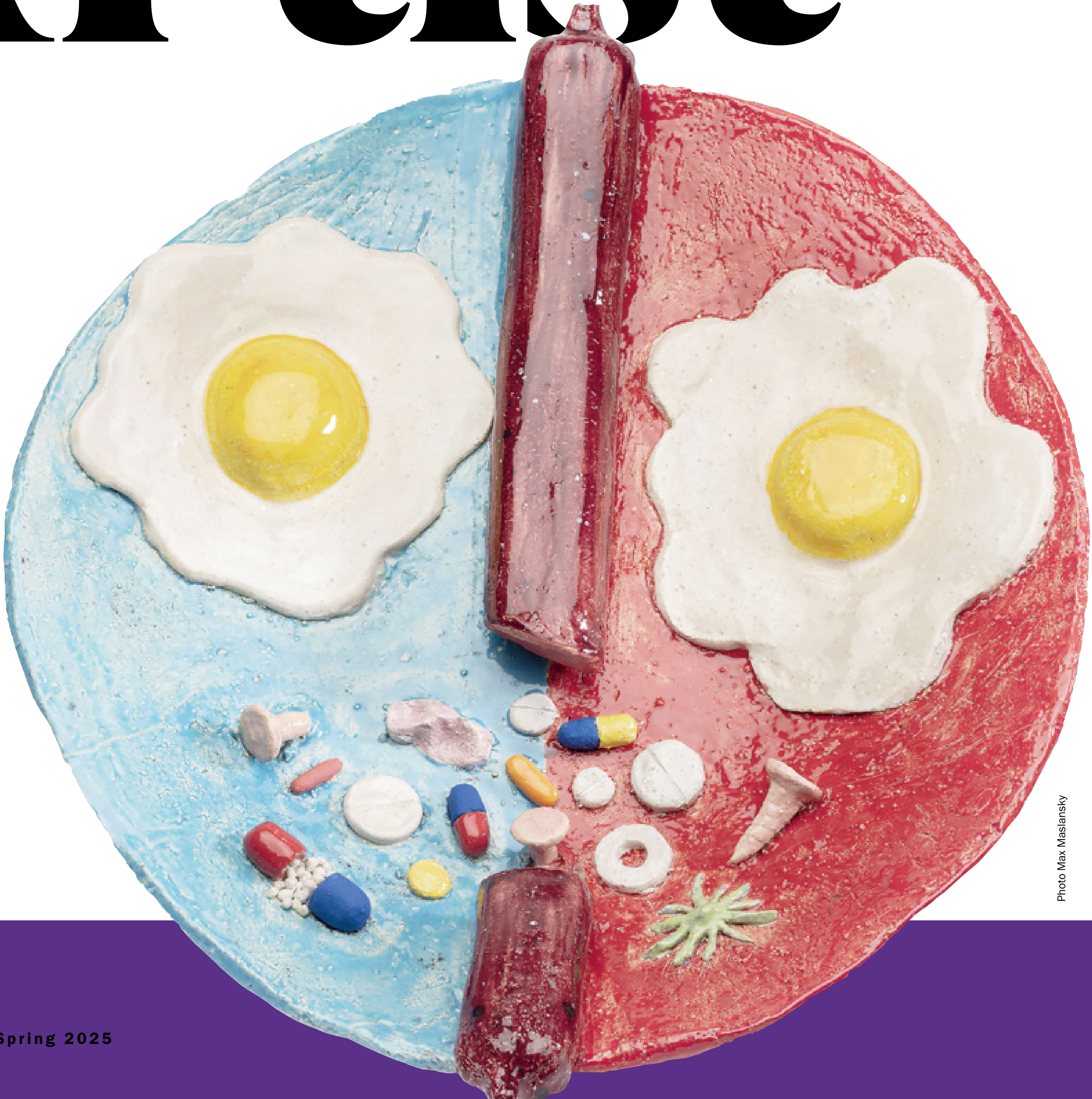
"The object, to me, is most interesting when you think about how it deteriorates and what is required to support its existence," Hedva said. "Objects exist in the space-time continuum – they're not relics that stand still frozen in time, they're actually alive." Also, they added, "to get a knife into a wall of a museum, you need equal parts fury and big dick energy and the utmost care because the public can't be able to pull it out."

Certain works from the Gropius Bau show gained new life in Hedva's solo show "Genital Discomfort" at TINA, a gallery in London, this past fall. The artist reimagined the hourglass described above, for instance, as a large-scale vessel hung from the ceiling with butcher-like hooks and chains, filled with a newly concocted batch of black goo – a pigmented industrial-grade silicone oil – to count down to the end of the show (and ruin the gallery's carpet in the process). "In order to show that piece more than once," Hedva explained, "it has to go through a death and rebirth." The gallery was also bathed in yellow light, perhaps an ode to the use of the color by the artist P. Staff, whose work Hedva praised in an essay titled "What Can Be Seen Farther than Any Color on Earth"; in the same essay, Hedva also cites yellow as their favorite color "because it can be so many different things: toxicity and illness and gold and honey, the sun and the moon."

Around the time of the show in London, Hedva told me that they too, "would love a little death and rebirth," alluding to a death calculation made according to their astrological charts. Hedva, who practices astrology both personally and professionally, had predicted their death to occur at age 40.5, which they reached last fall. After a revised calculation, however, they realized they actually don't expect to die until age 93.8. In any case, as Hedva had recently been telling their astrology clients, "we're all waiting for the end to come while the end is already happening." Embracing that ethos themself, Hedva added, "there is no beginning and there is no end – just cycles." ●

Photo Corey Bartle-Sanderson/Courtesy TINA, London

The Artist



Max Maslansky: *Shame Plate with Sausage and Pills and Miscellany*, 2022.

Photo Max Maslansky

There are several good reasons an artist might want to become a therapist. One is that the practices involve many of the same skills: soul-searching, analyzing, and embracing complexities of life that cannot be easily resolved. Another is the flexible, part-time-friendly yet steady nature of seeing patients, which nicely complements the routine of an artist.

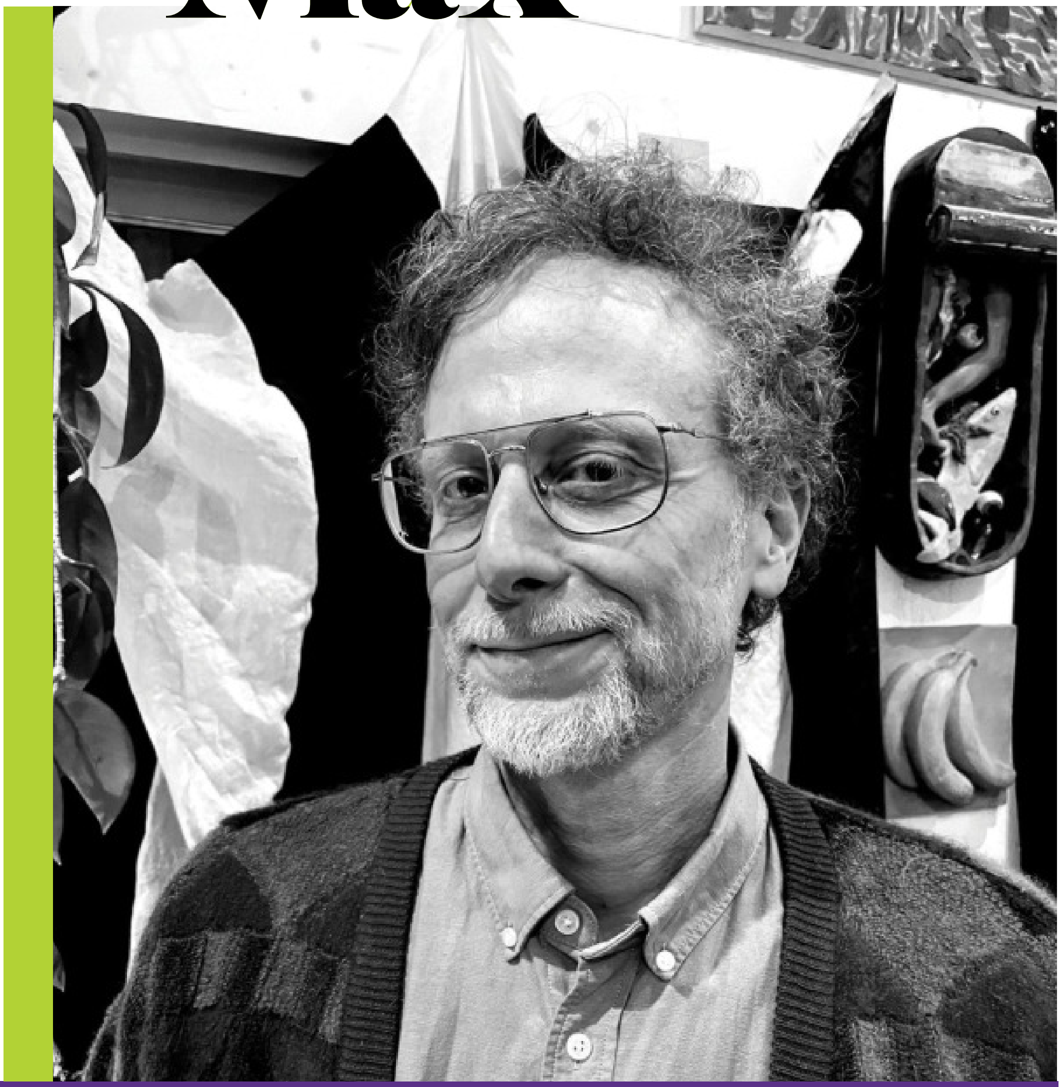
To discuss the convergences and challenges related to balancing two practices, a nomadic group of artist-therapists convenes as part of curator Prem Krishnamurthy's ongoing project "Department of Transformation," an amorphous group centered on healing and transformation. Is the crossover a growing trend, especially as both the size of the art world and the cost of living balloon, and as the taboo around discussing both mental health and day jobs shrinks? Or is it simply that artists are speaking more openly about side hustles than ever before?

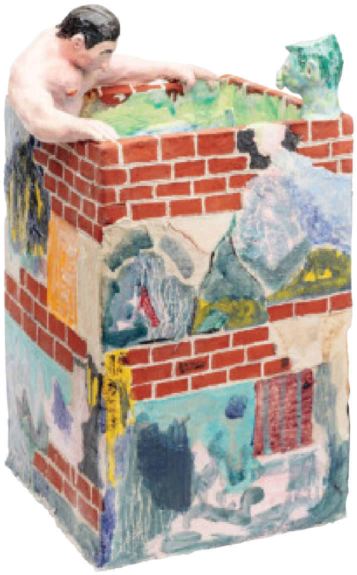
For certain, ours is not the first time artists have bridged the disciplines of art and therapy. The Brazilian artist Lygia Clark practiced both, regularly foregrounding art's therapeutic potential. Louise Bourgeois was a voracious student of psychoanalysis. And Meret Oppenheim was a patient of Carl Jung himself. It also seems notable that, these days, a good number of artist-therapists are photographers: in addition to the photographers included below, Elad Lassry and Leigh Ledare have made the jump, leaving one to wonder if the two fields share certain impulses. To learn more about that and other motivations, *A.i.A.* talked to four artists about how their practices as both artist and therapist relate.

interviews by
Emily Watlington

Will See You Now

Max Maslansky





Max Maslansky: *Himbo and Shame Eating Sea God Vessel at the Bath*, 2022.

Why did you decide to become a therapist?
From my early 30s, I thought I might become a therapist if being in the art world became too much to bear. Surely enough, in my mid-40s, I decided I had had enough of its fashion cycles, its vicissitudes, and its fickleness. Soon, I was applying to graduate school again, this time for counseling. I told a friend, "I give up being an artist *in the art world*," which felt good, if a bit shocking. I had wanted to be an artist—and I didn't give up being an artist, really. I just gave up, at least temporarily, tying part of my identity to being someone who reveled in his work being seen, valued, and acquired by collectors and institutions.

I knew I needed a passion other than making art that would be financially stable and emotionally satisfying. Being an artist tends to be a very selfish business that involves spending many hours alone. The world needs art, but the cost of making it feels indulgent, whereas being a therapist has more of a direct contribution to the betterment of something or someone.

Now that I'm in my second year of training as a therapist, I feel ready to make art again, with the same ambition I've always known, though I am tentative about wanting to be part of the art world as I knew it. More than anything, I've realized making art is about self-care. That is what is most important now.

What kind of therapy do you practice, and why?
I practice psychoanalytic therapy, the branch originally founded by Freud and since elaborated and refined by so many others. I chose that modality because I fell in love with its language and stories, its focus on the earliest relationships in one's life and how they color the present.

What do art and therapy have in common?
Art-making is self-care. Not making it, one can feel like a slice of one's self has been taken away. In that sense, art is very similar to therapy, because its practice can bring you in better contact with yourself. Art is a healing dialectic with the self, whereas therapy is a healing dialectic with another person—which is ultimately a more effective and efficient way to bring about personal growth and understanding. Another mind helps decipher between reality and fantasy.

Did your evolution surprise you, or had you always been curious?
My evolution surprised me mildly. I tend to be very persistent, so to "give up" on the art world felt like a huge rupture in my life's narrative. On the other hand, it felt like I was always going to take this road, knowing that my values are not aligned with those of the art world.

What has surprised you most?
Working as a trainee therapist has been humbling. Starting a new skill from scratch can be difficult at times. But I am surprised by how fast I am learning "on the job."

Has working as a therapist changed your art?
It's made my practice feel much more open-minded and expansive, less concerned with distinct purposes and goals in mind.

Maslansky (b. 1976) is a painter who has exhibited at Gavin Brown's Enterprise in New York, the 2014 edition of "Made in L.A.," and elsewhere.

Photos Max Maslansky (2)

Rachelle Anayansi Mozman Solano

Rachelle Anayansi Mozman Solano: *M, as Berber,* 2016.

From top: Courtesy Rachelle Anayansi Mozman Solano; Photo Maureen Drennan

Why did you decide to become a therapist?
I was interested in the little I knew about psychotherapy from a young age; I had this Freud book on dreams. After getting my MFA in photography, I began seeing a therapist whose office was in the consultation rooms of the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis (NPAP) in New York. I saw a brochure for courses and decided to audit one. That course was on Borderline Pathology, and I became engrossed.

I enrolled in the Training Institute of NPAP and began taking classes very slowly, in part because I soon moved to Panama, where I spent the next three years. It took me 14 years to complete the training and arrive at the stage called Readiness for Control, which means you have done enough self-analysis to understand the countertransference that can arise when working with patients.

What kind of therapy do you practice, and why?
I practice self psychology, which was developed by Heinz Kohut. The modality is part of the developmental psychology movement and involves repairing the negative unconscious voice that can be internalized as a consequence of, for example, a narcissistic parent. Positive transference with the therapist is meant to repair the patient's sense of self. If someone may have internalized the negative voice of a love object, self psychology aims to override this negative voice with a new positive one.

What do art and therapy have in common?
I have used some art therapy in psychoanalytic sessions, and it can be very helpful for the patient to place an image to a feeling. I do not believe that talk treatment is very different than the process of creating. But talking and being heard, and placing language to one's feelings, are distinct. Both are helpful.

Did your evolution surprise you, or had you always been curious?
In retrospect it makes sense. Psychoanalysis allowed me to understand myself and my family history, which I also do in my artwork.

What has surprised you most?
The spiritual connection that develops between therapist and patient. Giving therapy can be very spiritual work in the end. It is work about two souls that connect. This is the healing part in the work.

Has working as a therapist changed your art?
I was surprised by how much psychoanalysis impacted my practice. The more I listened to my patients, the more oral history became important to my art. The intersections between languages, the words people choose, and also the somatic feelings held in the body became more interesting to me as I continued with psychoanalytic work.

Mozman Solano (b. 1972) is a photographer and recipient of a 2024 Guggenheim Fellowship.

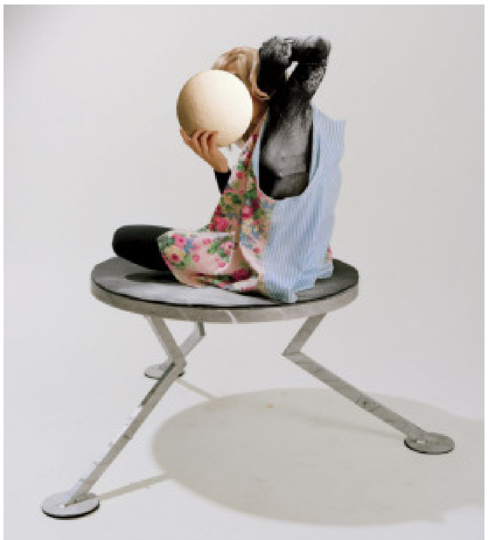
Nancy de Holl

Why did you decide to become a therapist?
I think becoming a psychoanalyst was an intuitive progression out of my art practice. I was first introduced to psychoanalysis by way of a Lacan seminar in graduate school. I understood virtually nothing, but it had an impact. I remember making photographic work at that time that explored a fantasy of liberating images from their real-world referentiality so that they'd become "autonomous." I was transforming found images into large black-and-white prints.

My first solo show was, in retrospect, very self-therapeutic. My family had abruptly moved out of my childhood home, and I was coming to terms with their new house as an adult. It was then that I became interested in the Freudian uncanny and began to think about the domestic space from a psychoanalytic perspective.

I had a fortunate run in the New York art world in the early 2000s, but after the 2008 financial crisis, I had to find regular work, which compromised my studio practice. I started my own therapy, and as that work deepened, I began to reject the idea of audience as my artwork became more introspective. I had a hard time reconciling the personal meaning I found in my work with the hard realities of the art market circuitry.

While teaching at the New School in 2014, I audited an advanced Relational Psychoanalysis class. I was captivated by the clinical experience of psychoanalysis and the close-process examination of human interaction. I then embarked on an independent study, attending psychoanalytic colloquiums and lectures throughout the city, eventually finding the courage to apply to the Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research in 2015.



Nancy de Holl: *A Crossbreed*, 2007.

What kind of therapy do you practice, and why?
I practice psychoanalysis, or psychoanalytic psychotherapy. It's the only mode that makes sense to me ethically and aesthetically.

What do art and therapy have in common?
Freud and many psychoanalytic thinkers have grappled with this question and view creative capacity, artistic and otherwise, to have a therapeutic aim. In both, there's a meeting of the mysterious and the familiar, a fluctuation between indulging in the free play of fantasy and then organizing these fragmentary impressions or giving them a shape.

The pictorial is part of the psychoanalytic process. Images populate the consulting room when one is free-associating and they can have a transformative power as they light up the analyst's imaginary, which hopefully facilitates an insight or internal shift in the analyst that the patient can sense and make use of. Some analysts believe that the only kind of transformation that can take place is through a pictorial representation in the mind of the analyst.

I think these disciplines are distinct in that psychoanalysis prioritizes the patient's needs and psychic contents. In some ways, as an analyst, you have to be selfless and give yourself over to the patient's inner milieu.

Has working as a therapist changed your art?
I'm not currently making art because I feel more engaged with my clinical work. I do fantasize about returning to a studio practice at some point; I miss it quite a bit.

Did your evolution surprise you, or had you always been curious?
As is often stated in this line of work: It both surprised me and didn't. I think it was mostly a matter of finding courage to explore this other side of myself.

De Holl (b. 1976) is a painter and photographer who has exhibited at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit; and elsewhere.

Photos Nancy de Holl (2)

Yamini Nayar

Why did you decide to become a therapist?
It's an idea that I had circled around for years. In my art practice, I always engaged my own interiority and my own history. I love having a studio practice and its solitudes, but there's something about sitting down with another person that I was really craving. Then I had my son, and started training. At first the process felt daunting and long, but it started to make more sense.

What kind of therapy do you practice, and why?
I'm training with the Jung Institute, which is also known as depth psychology or analytical psychology. I chose this a little bit by chance; it's not what I planned. My mother is a psychoanalyst, a Freudian, so I had been researching Freudian institutes in New York. But I've found that Jungian psychoanalysis is closer to some Eastern thought, and that resonates with me. I think a Jungian approach can be amazing for artists, because it revolves around this idea that the psyche works in images, and emphasizes the role of symbols in dreams, which are distinct from the Freudian signifier. One never completely concretizes a fixed meaning for a symbol, which feels very generative.

What do art and therapy have in common?
As a photographer working in the studio, the shift to the consulting room feels natural to me. Both spaces are based on this dyad, and involve a heightened awareness and sensitivity: looking, listening, and using all your senses. Also, in both the artist-object and the analyst-patient dynamic, I find that a kind of co-creation happens.

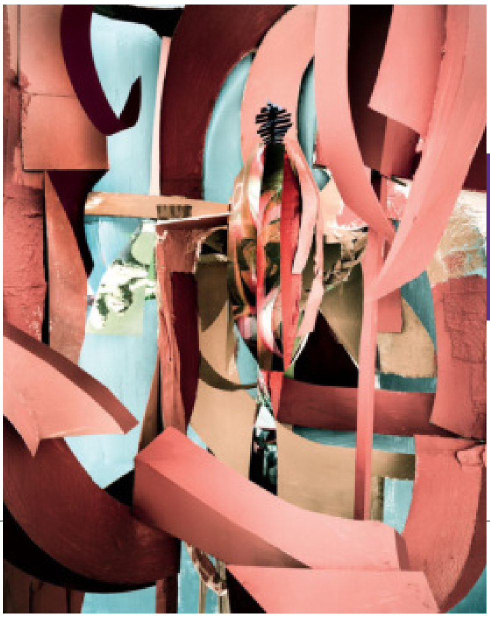
There's always this question in the Jungian world as to whether Jung was an artist or a scientist. He was a scientist, a psychiatrist—but the work is so creative.

Did your evolution surprise you, or had you always been curious?
Having grown up with my mother [an analyst], there was some familiarity. Even my grandfather was a psychiatrist, a refugee from Bengal. Looking back, it makes sense as an evolution.

What has surprised you most?
The diversity of patients—it's such a range. Yet, with each, you start to create something together, to make meanings, and connect with one another.

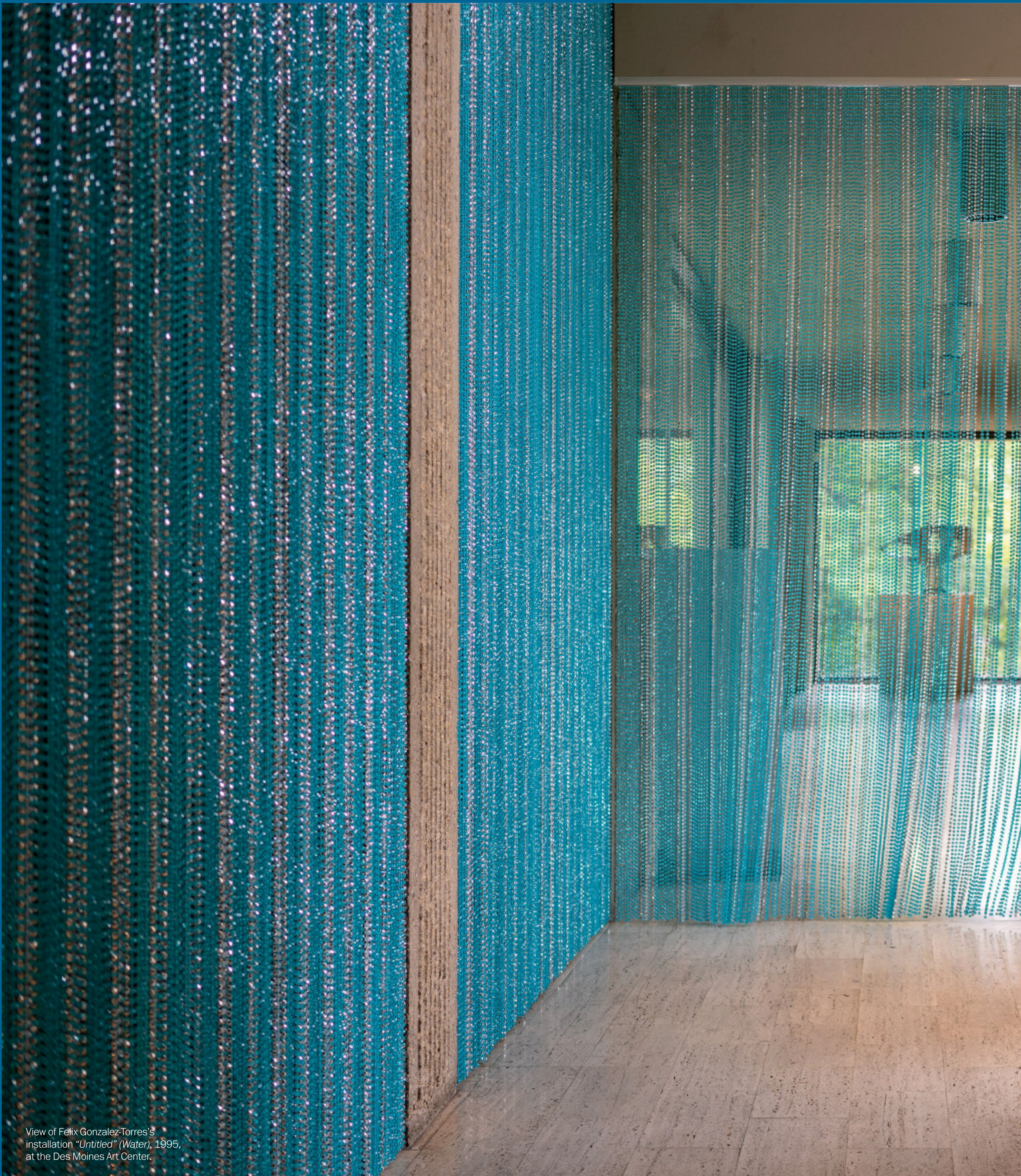
Has working as a therapist changed your art?
How could it not? My last show featured a source-material wall that drew from Jungian concepts—not specifically my clinical practice, but from his ideas of archetypal symbolism. I would love for analytic ideas to be taught in art school. It's human nature, psyche, interiority. There's so much there that art students would benefit from. ●

Nayar (b. 1975) is a photographer whose work is in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Guggenheim Museum, among others.

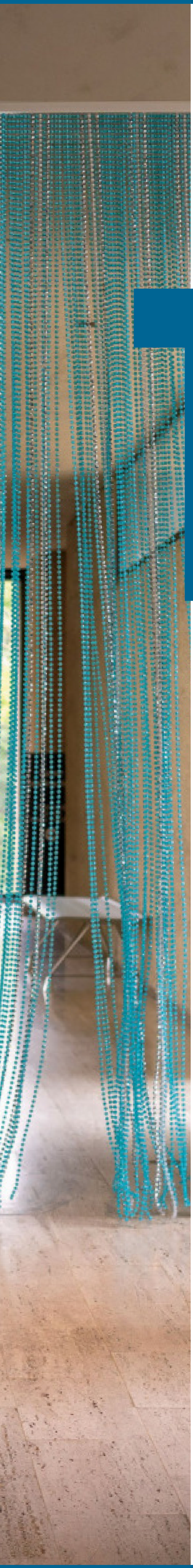


Yamini Nayar:
Full Circle, 2022.

From top: Photo Fernando Sandoval/MW; Photo Kate Cunningham



View of Felix Gonzalez-Torres's installation *"Untitled" (Water)*, 1995, at the Des Moines Art Center.



THE FGT EFFECT

Artists weigh in on the enduring influence of Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

as told to Maximilíano Durón

In his influential book *Poetics of Relation* (1990), Édouard Glissant advocated for "the right to opacity for everyone," referring to the ways individuals might, through art, speak from their perspective while preserving all the nuances of their humanity, rather than flattening or reducing it for easy legibility or categorization. No one exemplifies this better than Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957–1996), who was working around the time Glissant wrote the book, creating art that would become an important touchstone for generations of artists.

Made of everyday objects – piles of candy, curtains of beads, pairs of clocks – Gonzalez-Torres's works don't typically reveal their weighty stories readily. Instead, they obliquely yet poignantly capture his experience living as a queer person of color at the height of the AIDS crisis. *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, 1991, for example, is a pile of candies said to approximate the weight of the artist's late lover; viewers can take the candies, which are continually replenished. Works like this one point to the absence – the death – that surrounded Gonzalez-Torres in the late 1980s and '90s. They are deeply personal and intimate, but also speak to more universal themes of love, loss, and how the two are ever intertwined.

Gonzalez-Torres's works are heady and conceptual, but at the same time, deeply affecting. The artist is currently the subject of "Always to Return," an exhibition co-organized by the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery and the Archives of American Art that frames his object-based works as a kind of portraiture. For the occasion, *A.i.A.* spoke to an intergenerational group of artists impacted by Gonzalez-Torres. They noted his ability to make absence present; the mutability of his score-based works, which are reconstituted according to the artist's instructions each time they are shown; and how his works live on after his untimely death from AIDS-related complications – how even today, his presence is profoundly felt.

JOEY TERRILL

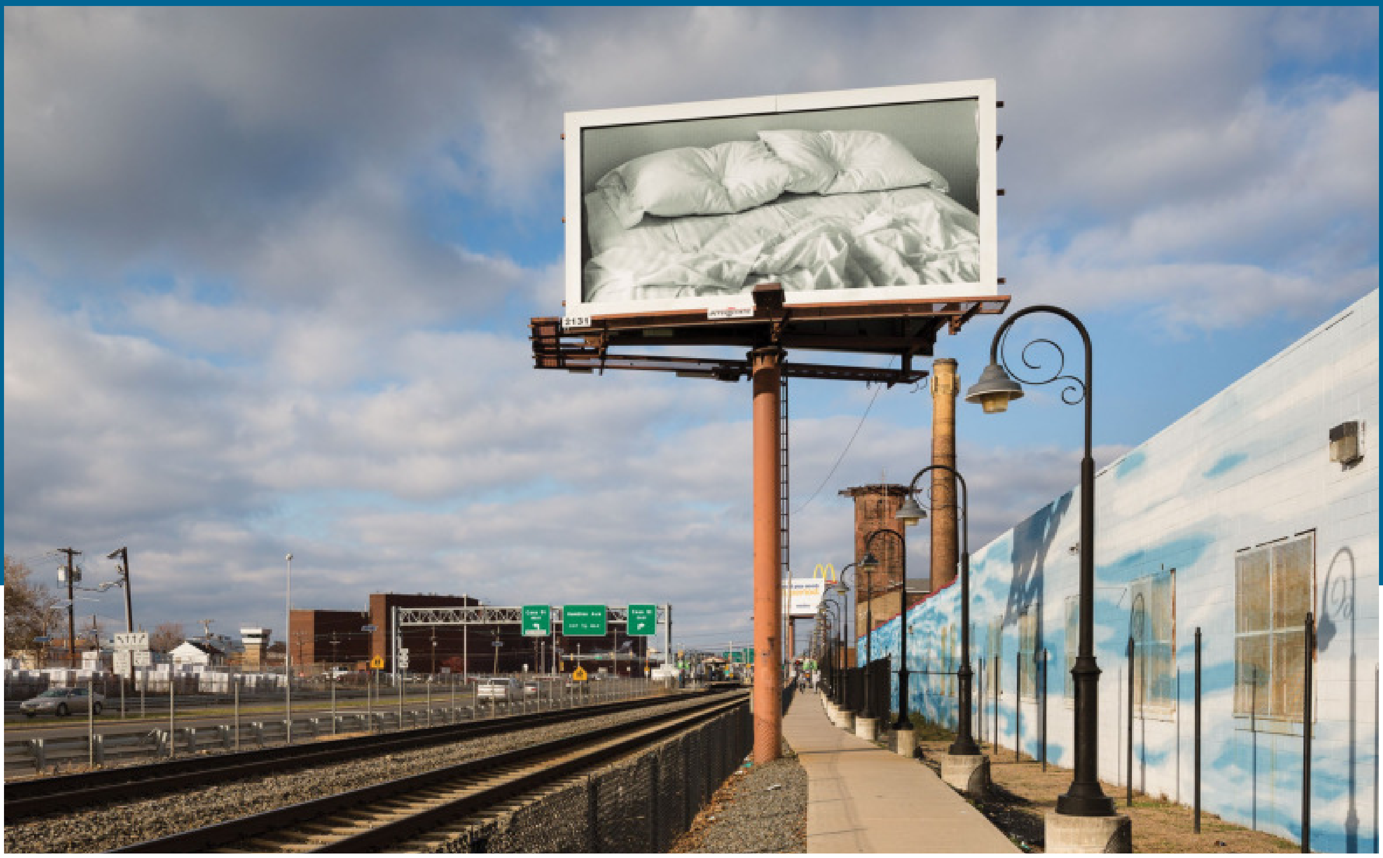
(BORN 1955)

I never had the pleasure of meeting Felix Gonzalez-Torres, but I wish I had. The first work I saw by him was likely the billboard series with the two pillows [*"Untitled"* (1991)]. At first, I thought, Gee, there's a billboard advertising pillows, but there's not much information. Still, I kept wondering, *What is that?* I remembered the two indentations in the pillows, traces of the two people who had been there. When I read more about it, I was extremely moved. I remembered looking at [*"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, 1991] a few years back and seeing people pick up the candy, start eating it, and walk away. It occurred to me that engaging with the piece was a lot like the way HIV was transmitted: you come upon an individual person, you engage with them, and then you walk away. You're eating the candy. You are taking a part of that virus.

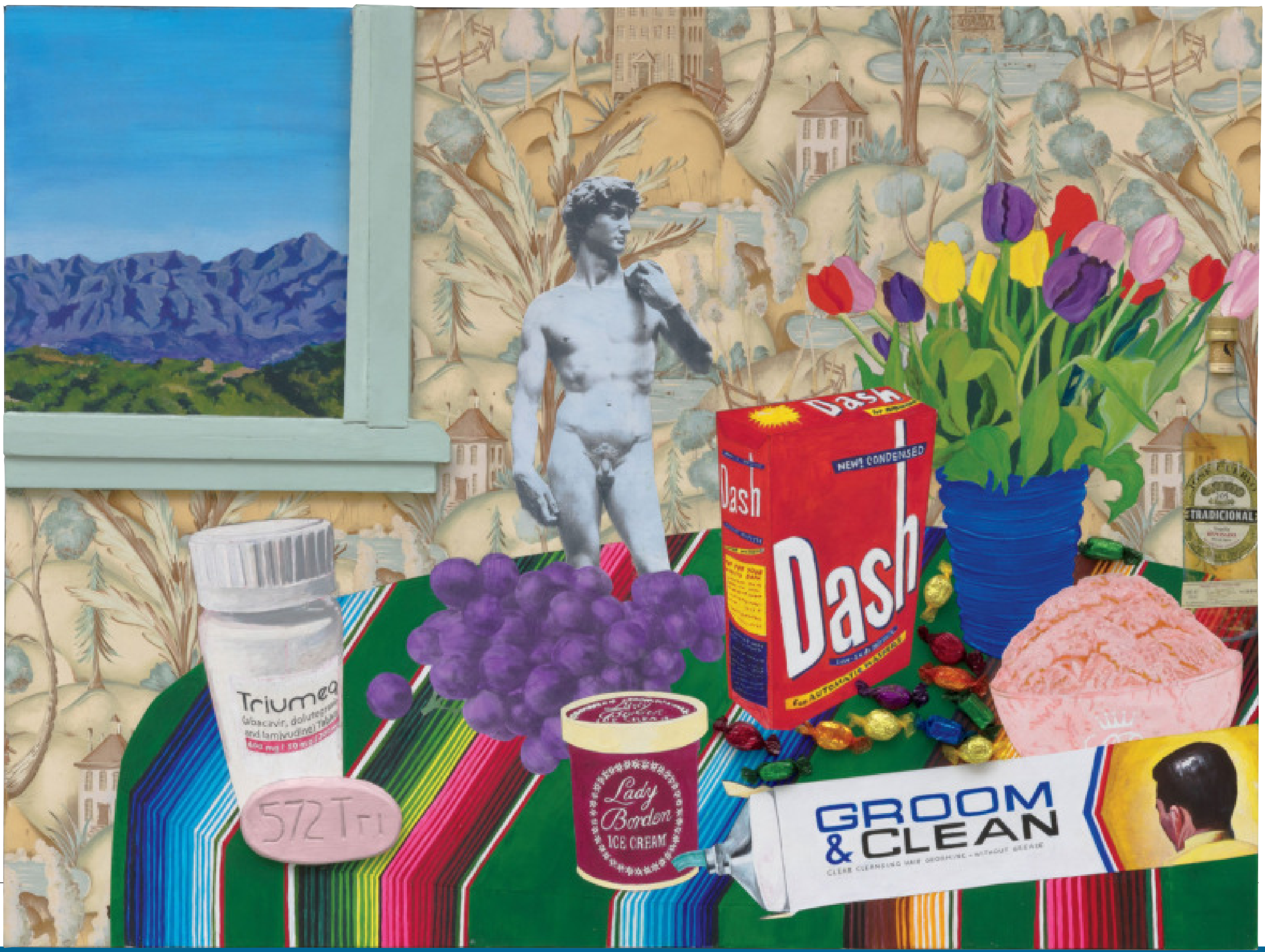
Gonzalez-Torres's conceptual approach is almost the complete opposite of how I've approached my work as it refers to HIV/AIDS. He was able to use that trope of conceptual art and then imbue it with deep emotions specific to the AIDS crisis. That was a very subversive tactic, because the conceptual aspect of his work still speaks to people who otherwise might be uncomfortable with the topics of HIV/AIDS or homosexuality.

All these years later, I continue to engage with his work. I started my "Still Life" series in 1997, the year after I tested undetectable for the first time. That experience put me in a very different situation, one Felix Gonzalez-Torres never got to experience. I, on the other hand, found myself for the first time thinking I was actually going to live. I had a range of emotions. I felt very conflicted that I was going to live and many of my friends did not. I was questioning why that was, especially those friends who perhaps took the same medications I did.

Previous spread: Photo KC McGinnis for The Washington Post via Getty Images

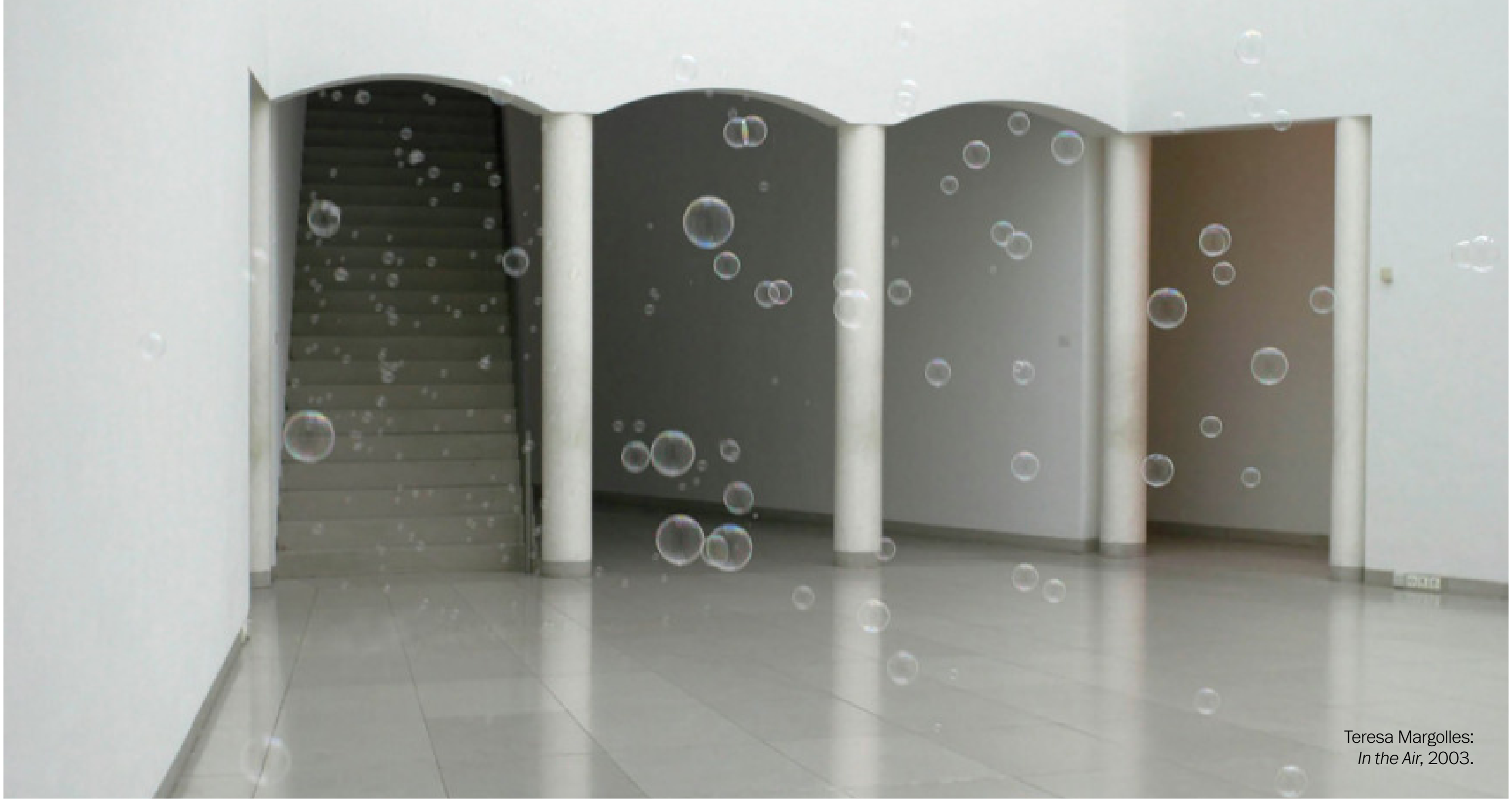


Gonzalez-Torres: *"Untitled,"* 1991, installed in Princeton, N.J., in 2013.


Triumeq
572 Tri
Dash
NEW! CONDENSED
Lady Borden ICE CREAM
GROOM & CLEAN
TRADICIONAL

Joey Terrill: *Still-life with Triumeq and Wrapped Candies that Remind Me of the Artist Felix Gonzalez Torres,* 2023.

From top: ©Estate Felix Gonzalez-Torres/Courtesy Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation/Photo James Ewing; Courtesy Marc Selwyn Fine Arts, Los Angeles, and Ortuzar, New York/©Joey Terrill



Teresa Margolles:
In the Air, 2003.

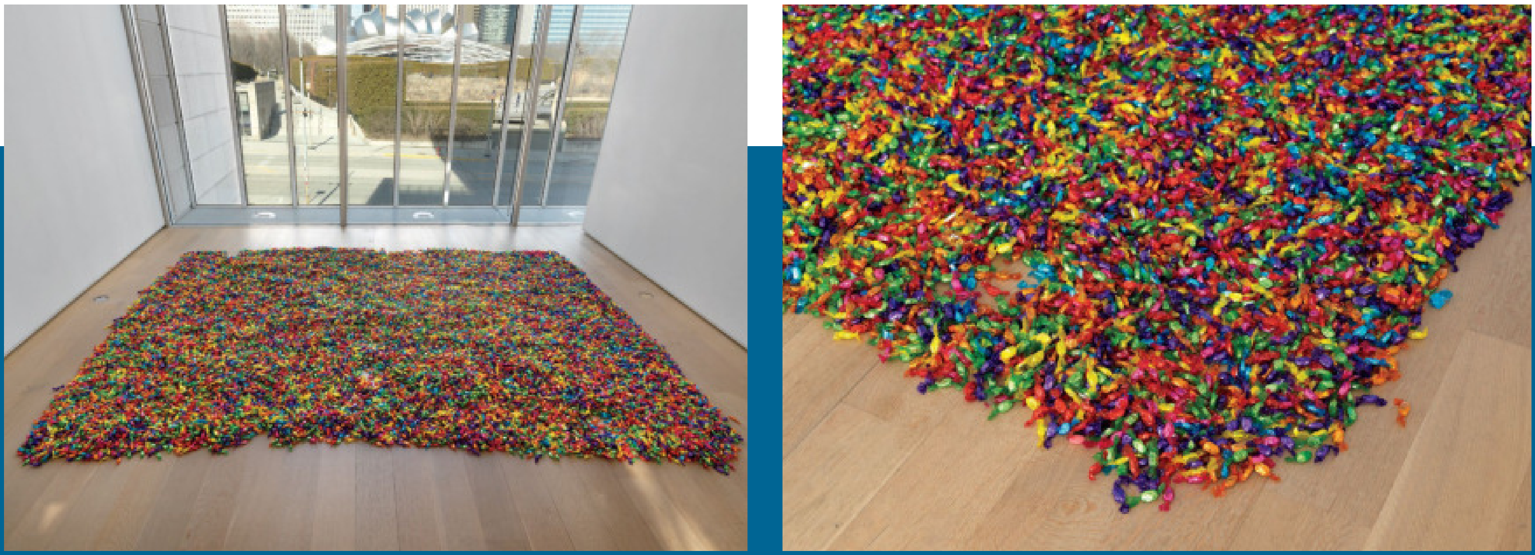
TERESA MARGOLLES

(BORN 1963)

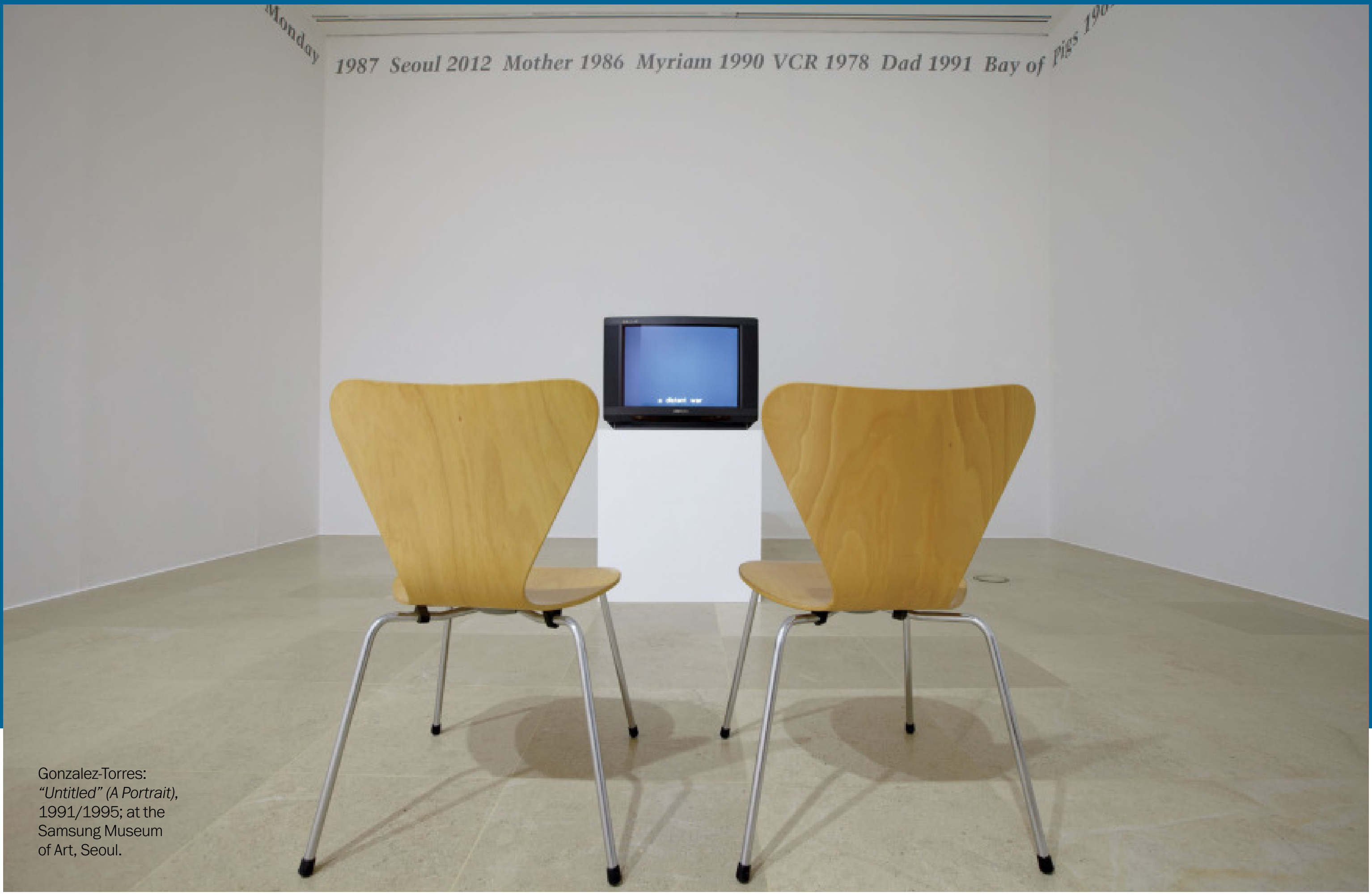
I first saw the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres in the early 2000s, though I had seen it in books and magazines earlier. When I saw the candy work, *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, I was very moved. To take the candy, put it in my mouth, and feel how it dissolved as I looked at his other works – that action impacted me a lot. I was thinking about which of my pieces have something in common with the work of Gonzalez-Torres, and I thought of *En el aire* (2003), which is composed of bubbles made with a mixture of soap and the water that was used to clean corpses – some of them murder victims – before their autopsies. Both involve exhibiting ephemeral objects in the museum, and hinge on interaction with the public. When the bubbles land on your body, you're remembering a person who was murdered, but the gesture also reaffirms that that person lived. By feeling drops of bubbles, the public gets intimate with death.

That shock is what I experienced with the candy. Having that small sculpture in my mouth helped me remember his lover but also that the artist was *alive* when he made this piece. I see that union between the contact of the living and the dead in *En el aire*, reminding you that you are on this earth, but also of those who are no longer here. Gonzalez-Torres showed me how delicate and difficult memory can be.

Two views of Gonzales-Torres's installation *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, 1991, at the Art Institute of Chicago.



From top: Courtesy James Cohan, New York/©Teresa Margolles; ©Estate Felix Gonzalez-Torres/Courtesy Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation/Photos Tom Van Eynde (2)


Monday 1987 Seoul 2012 Mother 1986 Myriam 1990 VCR 1978 Dad 1991 Bay of Pigs

Gonzalez-Torres: *"Untitled" (A Portrait)*, 1991/1995; at the Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul.

From top: ©Estate Felix Gonzalez-Torres/Courtesy Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation/Photo Sang Tae Kim; Courtesy Commonwealth & Council, Los Angeles

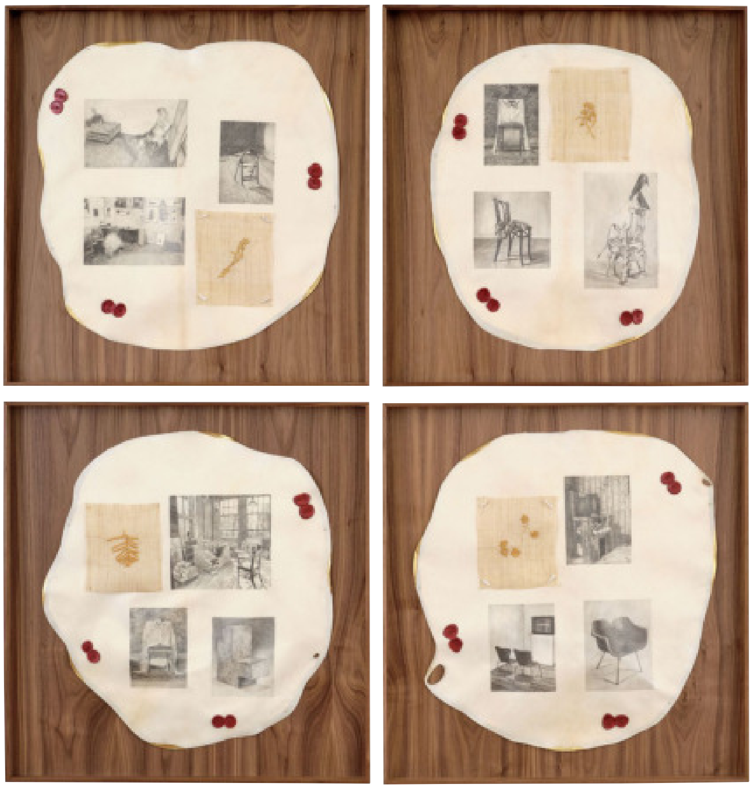
KANG SEUNG LEE

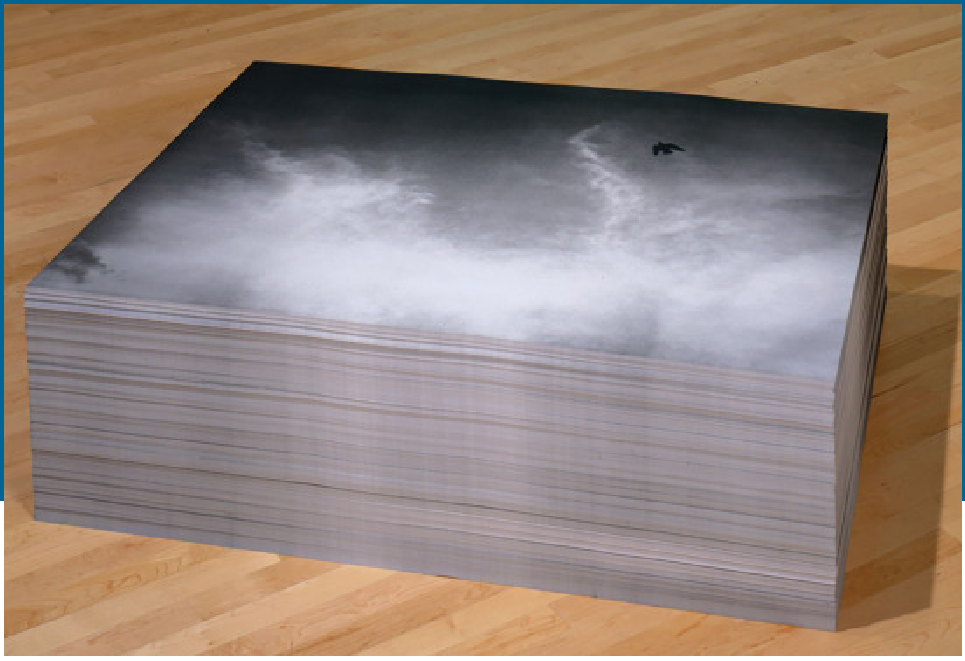
(BORN 1978)

Growing up in South Korea, I didn't see a Felix Gonzalez-Torres work until my early 20s, when I went to Australia for part of my undergrad studies. Because of his sexuality and the content of his work, it wasn't shown in Korea until 2012. I've made one work about Felix's work, part of my piece *Untitled (Chairs)* [2023]: It shows drawings of empty chairs that various late artists would have sat on in their studios. All the artists either died of AIDS-related causes or made work focused on HIV/AIDS. Chairs immediately evoke something about the body, something to be activated by a body. Looking at a chair when it's not occupied, we immediately think of the body and its absence.

In that work, I included a drawing of a photograph of Gonzalez-Torres's video installation involving two chairs, *"Untitled" (A Portrait)* [1991/1995]. It's about two bodies. It's a pair. Of course, it's about love; it's about the missing partner, it's about the dead. I think it's about something more than yourself, about how you can actually extend yourself through another body or even a community of people. His life and work have influenced mine tremendously, especially the way he talked about absence and presence. In my work, I try to pay tribute to the artists lost to the AIDS epidemic. I want to talk about how these people are lost, but their legacies are always present with us.

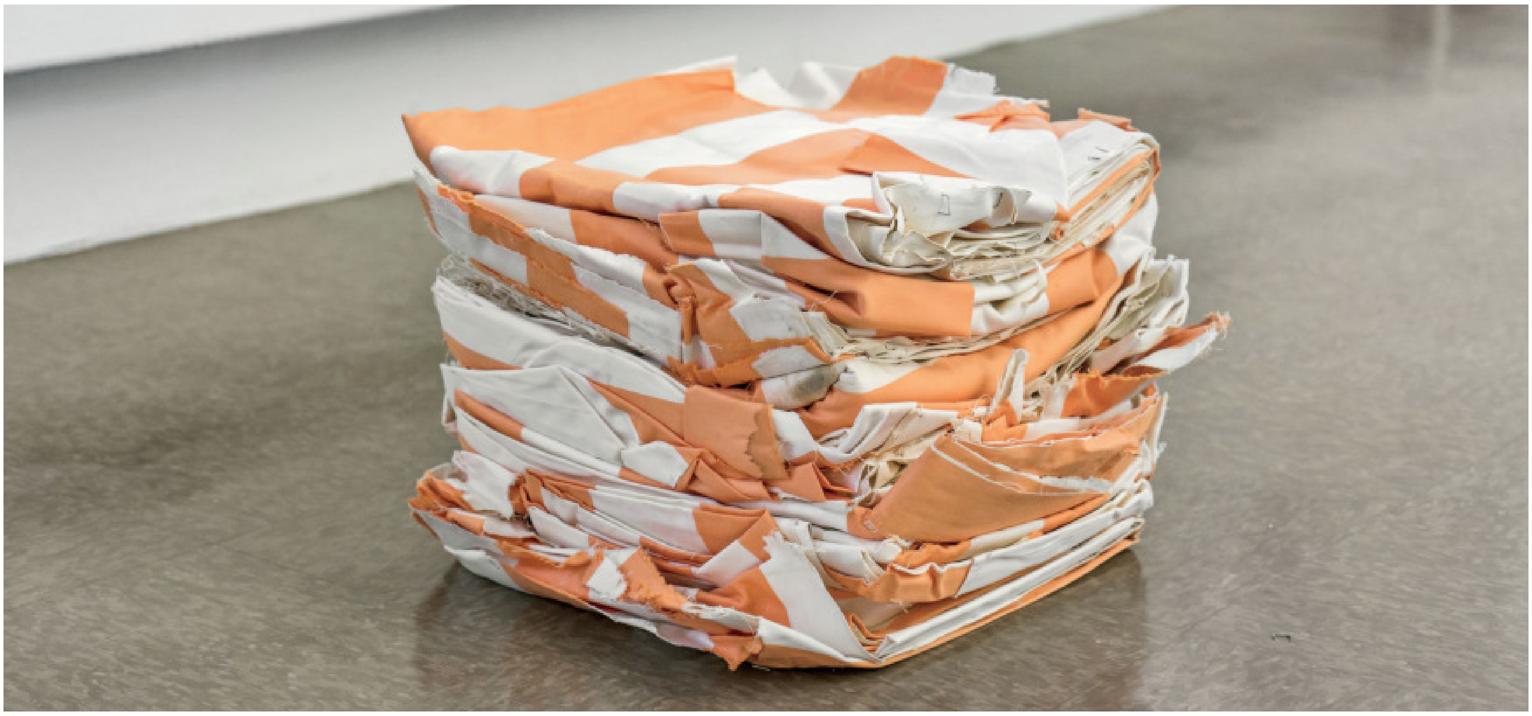
Kang Seung Lee: *Untitled (Chairs)*, 2023.





Gonzalez-Torres:
"Untitled,"
1992/1993.

Ghislaine Leung:
Holdings, 2024.



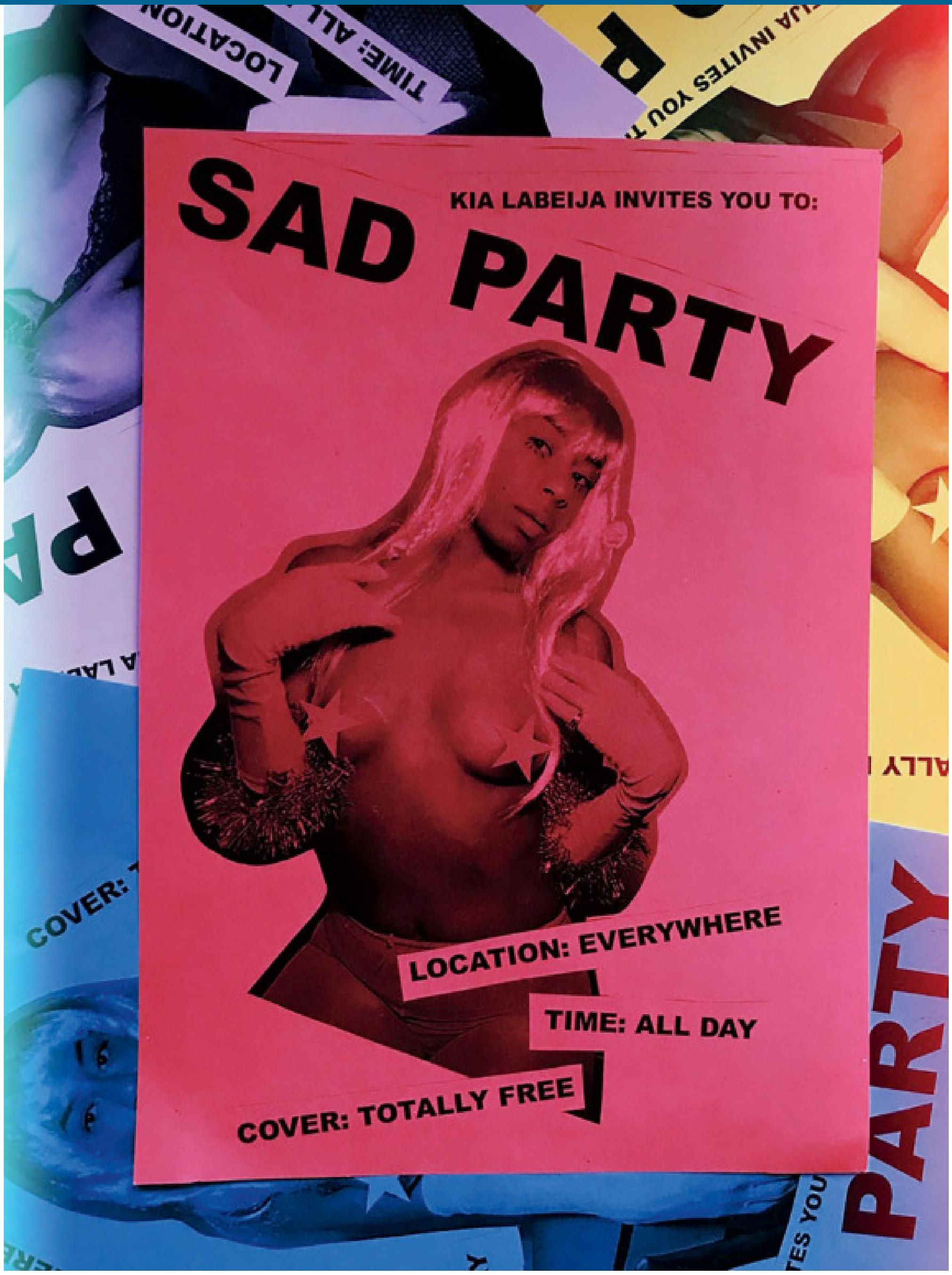
From top: ©Estate Felix Gonzalez-Torres/Courtesy Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation/Photo Ben Blackwell; Courtesy Renaissance Society, Chicago/Photo Bob

GHISLAINE LEUNG

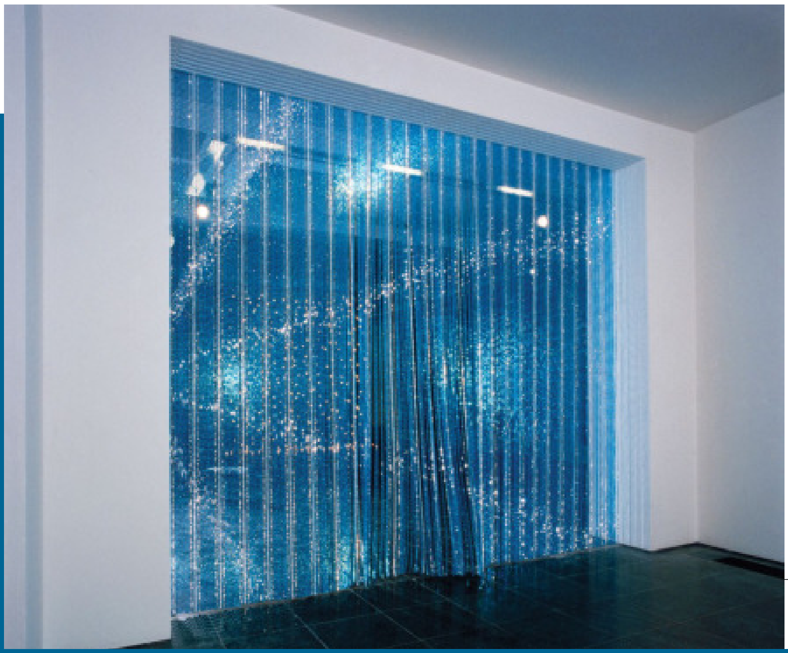
(BORN 1980)

I once got a present from my partner wrapped in a poster by Felix Gonzalez-Torres: an image of the sky, from one of the stack works [*"Untitled"* (1992/1993)]. I was probably in my mid-20s. I wasn't making art at the time, but this work's distribution – how it proliferated in the world, that this poster was and also wasn't the work – fascinated me. It worked through how it circulated, and in that way somehow also freed the work to have this oblique quality too.

I started working with scores myself because of a very basic limitation: I wanted to find a way of working I could maintain, both economically and emotionally. I wanted to find a way the work could work without me, with the material conditions at hand. The score was a way of doing that: of letting go of control and instead, showing works in a way so that I didn't have to be there to install them. The work constantly circles questions of labor and what work is deemed valid or not, as in *Holdings* (2024), a score for "An object that is no longer an artwork," and *Jobs* (2024) a score for "A list of jobs held by the artist." Those came very directly out of parts in my life that I had been compartmentalizing, hiding. That vulnerability is a risk, formally and personally, but also a tacit acknowledgment that artworks are always dependent on a great many other people to carry them. Gonzalez-Torres's practice actioned that for me in many ways. As he said in a 1995 interview with Ross Bleckner, "Your limitations should be your strengths."



A flyer from Kia LaBeija's untitled series, 2020–.



Gonzalez-Torres: *"Untitled" (Water),* 1995; at the Serpentine Gallery, London.

From top: Courtesy Kia LaBeija; ©Estate Felix Gonzalez-Torres/Courtesy Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation

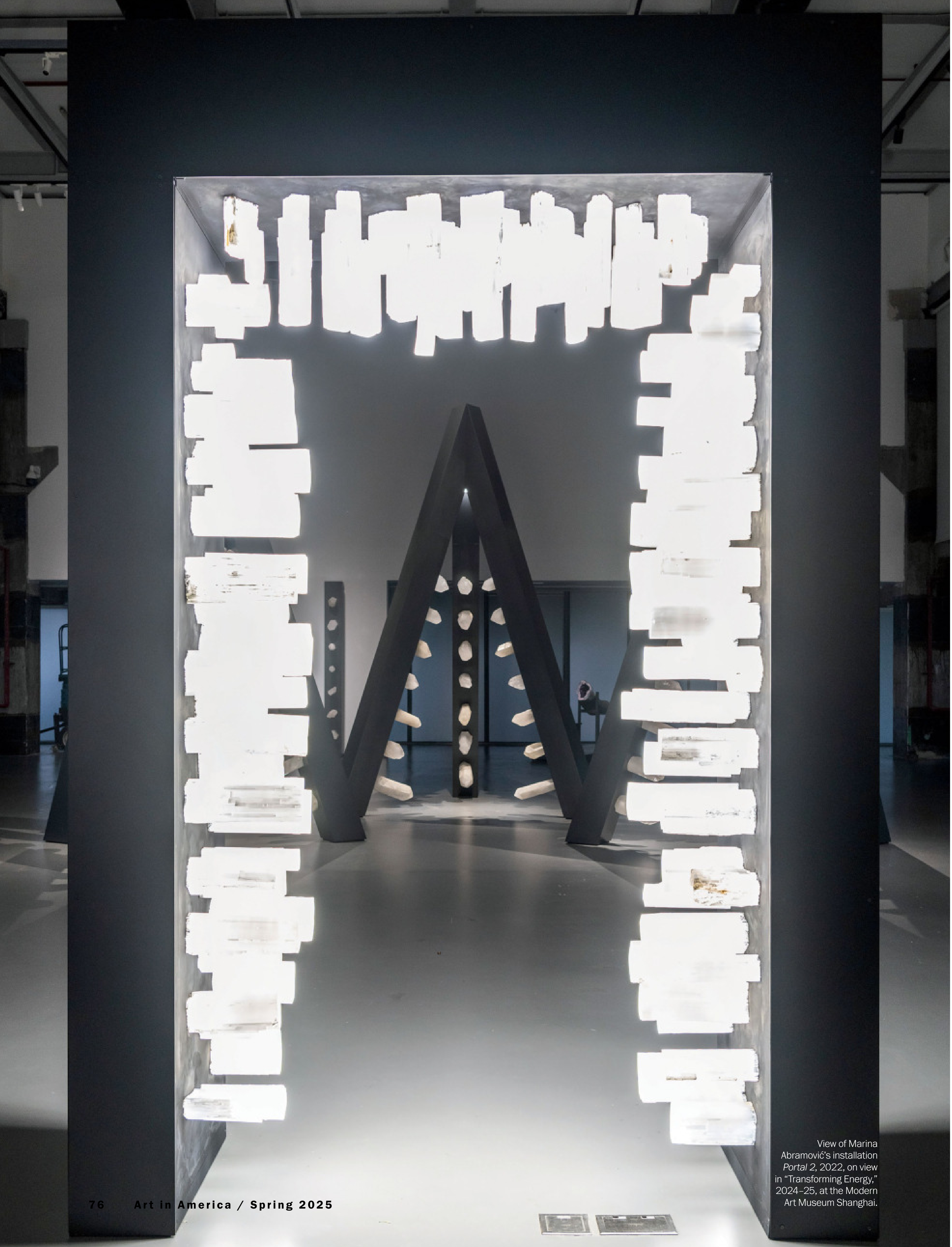
KIA LABEIJA

(BORN 1990)

The first time I encountered the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres in person was when we were both included in the 2016 exhibition "Art AIDS America" at the Zuckerman Museum of Art at Kennesaw State University in Georgia. His *"Untitled" (Water)* [1995] – that curtain of blue, clear, and silver beads – was in the show. More recently, I saw one of the candy works at the Art Institute of Chicago. That's a really generous work. I took a few candies and put them in a corner of my studio; it's like I have a piece of this artist. That work resonated with me, because in my practice, I've been thinking about the preciousness of work and the ways in which the work can interact with other people, as well as the act of giving.

I've been making these untitled paper flyer works for a few years. After showing them, I've let people take the flyers. I love the idea of the flyer being the party favor, of how someone can have something.

I've also been thinking of his billboard work, showing the empty bed, the impression of what once was. As someone making work around HIV, that particular body of work subverts what we think about when we think about AIDS. In a visual context, it's generally about what state people's bodies are in. The absence of those two bodies is very poetic. And again, it's very generous, to share something so intimate and personal. In a way, you're seeing a feeling. I lost my father a few months ago. When I went inside his house, I made a conscious choice not to photograph anything, except for one picture of just a few things that were left in the home on the floor. I think of it as a portrait of my father. ●



View of Marina Abramović's installation *Portal 2*, 2022, on view in "Transforming Energy," 2024–25, at the Modern Art Museum Shanghai.

Photo Yu Jieyu/Courtesy Modern Art Museum Shanghai

Infinite Energy

Is Marina Abramović’s Longevity Method a business or a performance?

by Marisa Meltzer

Could Marina Abramović be the wellness guru we needed all along? It could have been Gwyneth Paltrow, she of the jade eggs and bone broths and chugging Mountain Valley water, who seemed, for a while, like the prophet we were promised. But her company, Goop, has become more of a place to buy $900 jersey dresses and titanium cooking pans. Anyway, Goop has gone through multiple rounds of layoffs in the past few months alone.

If Goop isn’t your thing and you’re in search of a more out-of-the-box approach, consider Abramović, who once told the *New York Times* “I like baby food.” Want to learn to live like her? The Marina Abramović Institute offers €2,450 (~$2,600) five-day Cleaning the House workshops in various locations – Brazil, Thailand – taught by people (not her) trained to lead guests “through a series of long durational exercises to improve individual focus, stamina, and concentration.” Their cell phones, laptops, watches, and electronic devices will be collected, and “during the workshop, participants should refrain from eating, speaking, and reading.” (Herbal tea and honey are permitted.)

For those wanting to micro-dose the longevity method, she even markets 99£ ($125) longevity drops with a Swiss doctor (one for immunity, one for allergy, one for energy) to achieve inside-out beauty via active ingredients such as pollen, cranberry, lemon, and garlic. They are packaged beautifully, not unlike similar tonics one can purchase at a health food store.

Her commitment to wellness courses through not only the products and experiences she offers, but through her art as well – although Abramović would surely say those are all the same thing.

Her latest show, “Marina Abramović: Transforming Energy,” at the Modern Art Museum (MAM) Shanghai, boasts 150 works over three floors, including many crystal-based sculptures nodding to her interest in Eastern medicine. Some of the pieces resemble a cross between furniture and something more ominous. There are wooden beds with large crystals pointed at the head; copper tubs with crystals pointed where a faucet might be; deck chairs facing metronomes; doorways with crystals mounted on every surface.

Wellness has always been a theme in Abramović’s work, only now, it’s become more explicit. The show is inspired by, and is a sort of addendum to, one of her most famous durational performances: *The Great Wall Walk* (1988), where she and her former partner, Ulay, walked from opposite ends of the wall toward the center and toward each other. “Me from the Yellow Sea, which is water and female energy… he will walk from the desert, which is the fire and the male element, and we will meet in the middle and we are going to get married,” said Abramović over Zoom from Shanghai back in October, while she was setting up the show.

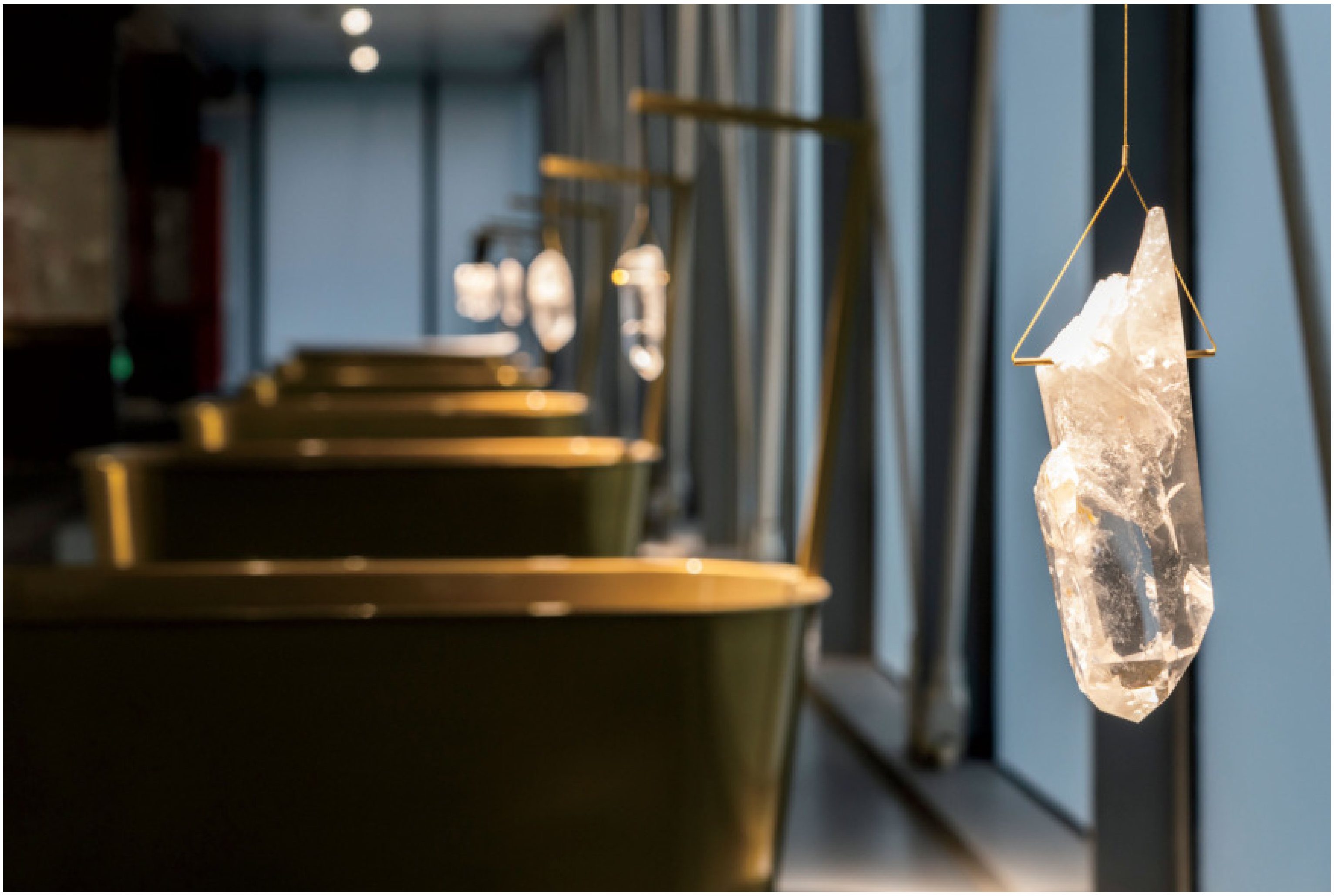
For someone who is nearing 78 years old, she looks incredible: smooth, even skin; thick hair; and seemingly infinite energy. Shai Baitel, the Shanghai show’s curator, noticed too: “Marina is beyond generation. She’s beyond age.” Whatever she is doing is working: sign us all up for the drops, the workshops, whatever it takes.

Back to the Great Wall in 1988: She and Ulay loved the concept, and hated the negotiations and organizing required to make it happen. It took about 8 years, in which “our relationship completely fell apart,” she says, laughing. They did not get married.

She found symbolism and spirituality in the Great Wall. “We discovered the Great Wall was actually not only this kind of fortress to keep enemies out of China in those days. It was like a metaphysical structure. It was seen as a replica of our Milky Way,” she says.

While she was walking, she’d sleep every night in a different village and try to meet the oldest people who lived there, asking them about healing techniques, recovery, and their myths. They often told her stories about dragons: green ones and white ones and red ones. The wall itself, she was told, was a dragon too. Its head was with the dead buried in the Yellow Sea, its tail in the Gobi Desert, its body the mountains. What Abramović took away was that these dragons she was hearing about were all related to the ground she was walking on. “I realized

Two images from *The Great Wall of China: Landscapes and Portraits*, 1988.



Bathtubs, 2000.

there was aqua, there was iron, there was copper and so on, and I noticed how the state of my mind was changing," she says.

After Abramović completed the journey, she went to Brazil, where her interest in minerals persisted. Her "transitory objects," works "in which you trigger the experience of these minerals and the feelings they have," spanned much of her work in the 1990s. During her 2010 retrospective at MoMA, she performed *The Artist Is Present*. Between March 14 and May 31, she spent 736 hours silent and unmoving while museumgoers took turns sitting opposite her.

Now arguably the world's most famous living artist, she has returned to China 36 years later. Using quartz, amethyst, tourmaline, copper, iron, and wood, she made objects for the audience to interact with. She doesn't consider them sculptures because the *object* is not

Top left and bottom: Photo Yu Jieyu/Courtesy Modern Art Museum Shanghai (2); Top right: Courtesy the artist

MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ LONGEVITY METHOD
ALLERGY RELIEF
ENERGY
IMMUNE

Marina Abramović's Longevity Method drops promise to support allergy relief, energy, and overall immunity.

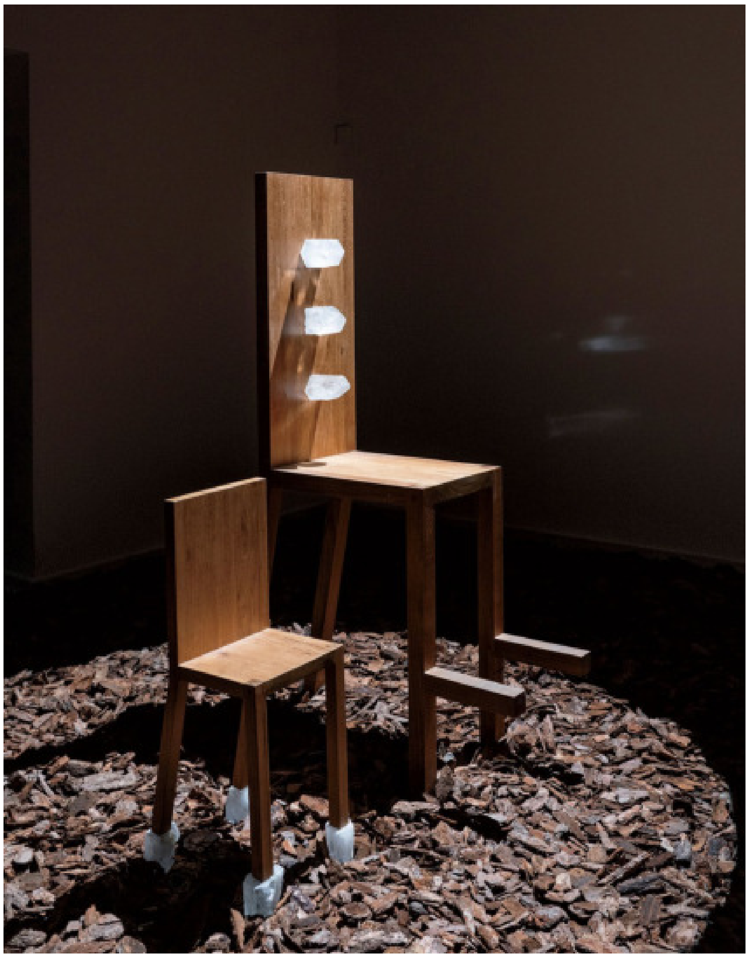
the point; the *energy* is. For example, there are concave stones mounted on the wall, inviting visitors to press their heads, hearts, and stomachs against them. "And then you actually don't even see the work because you just see people facing the wall," Abramović explains. In her ideal world, everyone would have a transitory object at home. "You do this before you make your espresso coffee, before you open a computer, before you look at your emails on the telephone," she says. "That's really something."

The show's title, "Transforming Energy," refers to the ways that the materials are able to transform our own energy, but also to how that energy is constantly changing. "Because if you think about Marina's philosophies, what is she all about?" asks Baitel. "Focus, disconnect from interruptions and the surrounding noise, discipline, disconnect from cellular phones, from social media, from focus on yourself, being in the present, be in the moment," he replies. "That's what we're doing with transitory objects. Which means I curated energy, I curated the metaphysical. This is an entirely new concept. It's the first time that an exhibition is curating energy."

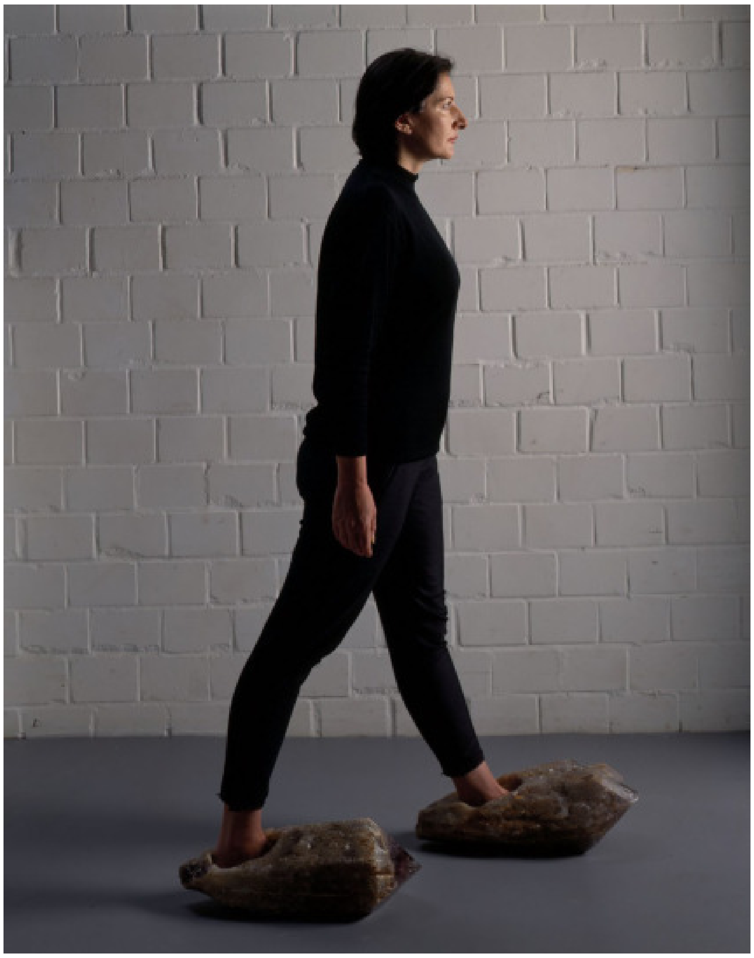
What does Abramović actually do for her own wellness routine? She swims. Every morning, for at least an hour. "I have to," she says. While in Shanghai, she eats congee in the morning and a lot of tofu, which she fell in love with in 1988. She sees a qigong master for stomach-focused body work, and frequently does supplementary exercises at home. "I am always looking how I can balance all this," she says, waving her arms. "Then taking long showers. It's really important because water is giving energy, but then you have to get energy back. And then sleeping. I need to sleep eight hours a day." Jet lag, she says, has only gotten harder to cope with as she ages – she'd been in China for two weeks when we spoke, and still felt it.

But here's the most relatable thing about her life and routine, something anyone can take away from the rarefied and wacky world of Marina Abramović. Beyond the alleged baby food diet (she doesn't mention it, and asking is useless; to talk to her is to submit to her own torrent of ideas), beyond the crystal healing, beyond the longevity tonics: she just wants to relax at home.

What she's looking forward to is a knee replacement. "It's a little bit fucked up. I tried the plasma shots, I tried everything," she says. "I went to the doctor, he looked at my knee. He said to me, What kind of opiates are you taking? I said, Nothing – I never take anything. He said, What? And you're walking on this?" So this past fall, she scheduled one. "I'm going to do physical therapy religiously," she says. "And I'm not going to travel for three months." She smiles at the thought. ●

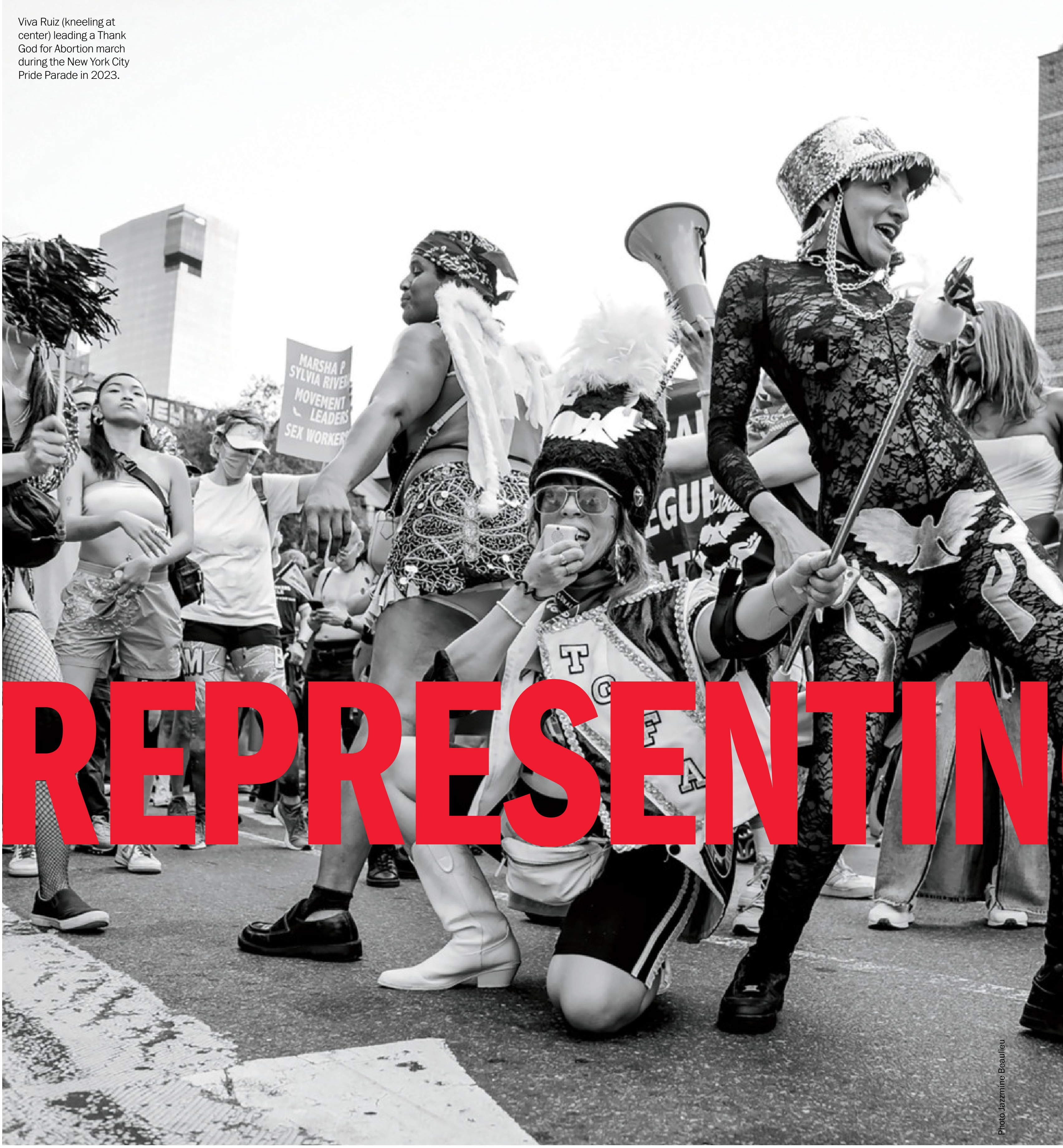


Chair for Human Use with Chair for Spirit Use, 2012.



Shoes for Departure, 1991/2017.

Top: Courtesy Marina Abramović Longevity Method; Bottom left: Photo Yu Jieyu/Courtesy Modern Art Museum Shanghai; Bottom right: Courtesy Sean Kelly Gallery, New York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Viva Ruiz (kneeling at center) leading a Thank God for Abortion march during the New York City Pride Parade in 2023.

REPRESENTIN

Photo Jazzmine Beaulieu

G ROE

Abortion art is trendy, but can it be transformative?

by Aliza Shvarts

Based on demographic analyses of the last United States presidential election, Norma McCorvey would probably have voted for Donald Trump were she alive today. The “Roe” of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), McCorvey was a non-college-educated white Christian woman who lived in the South. Born in Louisiana in 1947, she spent most of her life in Texas working as a janitor, housecleaner, waitress, and receptionist after dropping out of high school. She was married at 16, had her tubes tied by the age of 23, and said she never used contraception.

At the same time, she might not be that easy to pigeonhole: she in fact voiced her support for Hillary Clinton ahead of the 2016 election. McCorvey was also a lesbian, a sex worker, a sexual assault survivor, and an addict. She was raised mainly by her mother, Mary Sandefur, an abusive alcoholic who “beat the fuck out of her” for being a “die-hard whore,” as Sandefur herself told *Vanity Fair* in 2013. At the age of 10, she robbed a gas station with another girl and ran away to Oklahoma City; she was sent to reform school when a maid at the hotel where they were staying caught them kissing. She lived with her partner, Connie Gonzalez, another working-class lesbian, for 35 years despite her self-proclaimed belief that homosexuality was a sin.

What makes McCorvey such a resonant figure for the Trump era is precisely the contradictions she embodied. Many accounts describe her as narcissistic, “difficult,” and aggrieved – though her grief and grievance perhaps come as no surprise, given her lifetime of exploitation, manipulation, and abuse at the hands of her family, religion, the law, the state, and the pro- and antiabortion movements. Famously, in 1995, McCorvey “flipped” her position on abortion after converting to Christianity, because she felt condescended to and tokenized by the middle-class feminist movement. In response, she became a vocal part of the antiabortion right. In 2016 she made a “deathbed confession” to the documentary crew of *AKA Jane Roe*, declaring that she never actually believed in the antiabortion cause and only said what they paid her to say in a transactional relationship. She died several months later a woman who bore three children, raised none, and never had an abortion.

McCorvey’s biography brings into focus the contradictions and class antagonisms that surround not only abortion, but also broader questions of reproduction, care, and whose bodies and labor we value. These contradictions feel urgent and raw as we stare down two seemingly irreconcilable truths: A majority of US voters chose to protect abortion access in 8 of the 10 states where it was on the ballot. At the same time, and in many of those very same states, voters elected the man who claims credit for overturning *Roe v. Wade*, and who will potentially oversee the passing of a federal abortion ban. Certainly we are divided, but how those divisions cleave around bodily, social, and economic freedom is more complicated than our two-party system suggests.

I became interested in Norma McCorvey after my own experience with making art from abortion while an undergraduate student at Yale University in 2008. My project, *Untitled [Senior Thesis]*, involved a precise bodily intervention over the period of an academic year: From the 9th

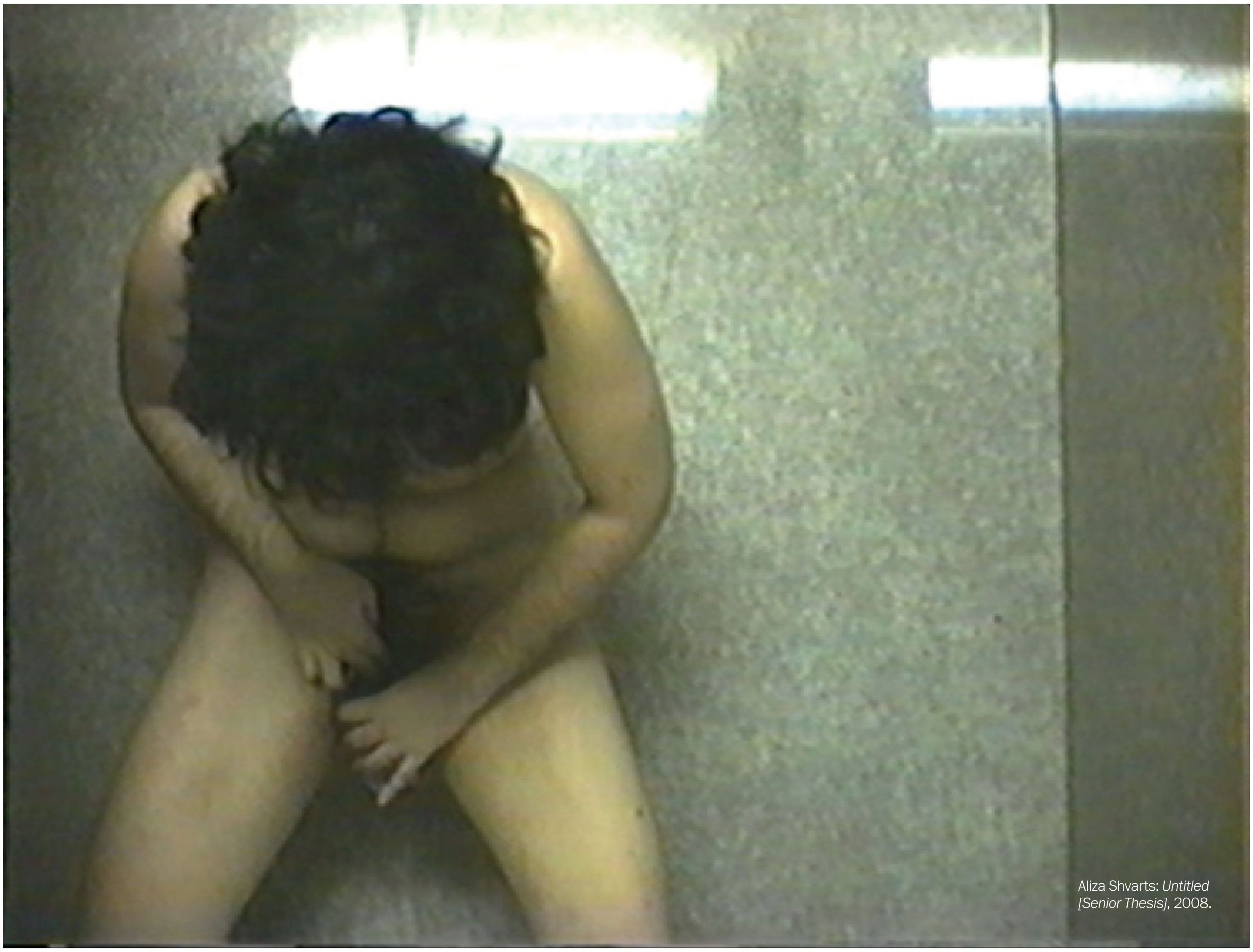
KEEP
ABORTION
LEGAL
KGIL
2

Attorney Gloria Allred (left) with Norma McCorvey, the "Jane Roe" plaintiff from the landmark court case Roe v. Wade, at a pro-choice rally in Burbank, Calif., in 1989.

to the 15th day of every menstrual cycle, I used semen (collected from "fabricators") to privately self-inseminate; on the 28th day of my cycle, I would ingest an herbal abortifacient, and experience cramps and heavy bleeding. This bleeding could have been either a normal period or a very early-stage self-induced miscarriage: The process was intentionally carried out so that not even I knew which. I used the term "self-induced miscarriage" because I was interested in what it meant to attempt reproduction "wrongly" on the body, specifically the queer body, and to use my biological capacities to create art.

As far as I know, I am the only artist who has made artwork from the intentional bodily act of abortion (others, please get in touch). That work caused enormous controversy, which was difficult to navigate for many years. I was denounced by both the left and the right, received death threats, and was told by the then dean of the Yale Art School that I would "never have a career as an artist." After these reactions, I wondered whether abortion and the self-management of one's reproductive capacities could ever be a palatable subject for the art world.

But in recent years, I've been heartened to see the groundswell of artists making work about abortion and reproductive freedom, as well as a resurgence of curatorial interest in such works past and present. I find myself especially struck by how many of the interventions contemporary



Aliza Shvarts: *Untitled [Senior Thesis]*, 2008.

From top: Photo Bob Riha Jr. via Getty; Courtesy the artist

BODY FREEDOM
F
EVERY(BODY)
BODY FREEDOM
MAXON

The “Body Freedom for Every(Body)” mobile exhibition space, wrapped in custom artwork by Barbara Kruger, stopped in New York in 2024.

artists are making today resonate with the complexities of religious belief, queer solidarity, women’s labor, and cultural value – impasses deeply ingrained in the story of *Roe*.

Art is a good vessel for narratives as complex as Roe’s, as complex as our less-than-black-and-white times. Artists deal in representation. Politics function through representation. The sustained labor of the curators and artists who have been doing work related to abortion for years makes clear that art about the subject can be more than a fundraising mechanism, market bump, or avenue for visibility. It can be a means to explore stories as complex as McCorvey’s, as well as other, deeper questions about reproduction and social order in the world we have – and the world we want.

Viva Ruiz often introduces themself as “a queer community-educated artist and advocate, descended from factory-working Ecuadorian migrants raised in Jamaica, Queens.” They have been making work about abortion since 2015 through their ongoing project, “Thank God for Abortion,” which they described in an interview with me as “inspired by my own abortions and how grateful I was to have them.” The project was conceived as a response to the closing of abortion clinics around the United States well before the 2022 *Dobbs* decision overturning *Roe*: “People die without access to abortion. Roe never meant access for everyone. Legality is different than access.” It was also inspired by what Ruiz perceived as the seeming indifference to abortion in the queer community, an attitude often laced with misogyny and narrow ideas about what queerness means.

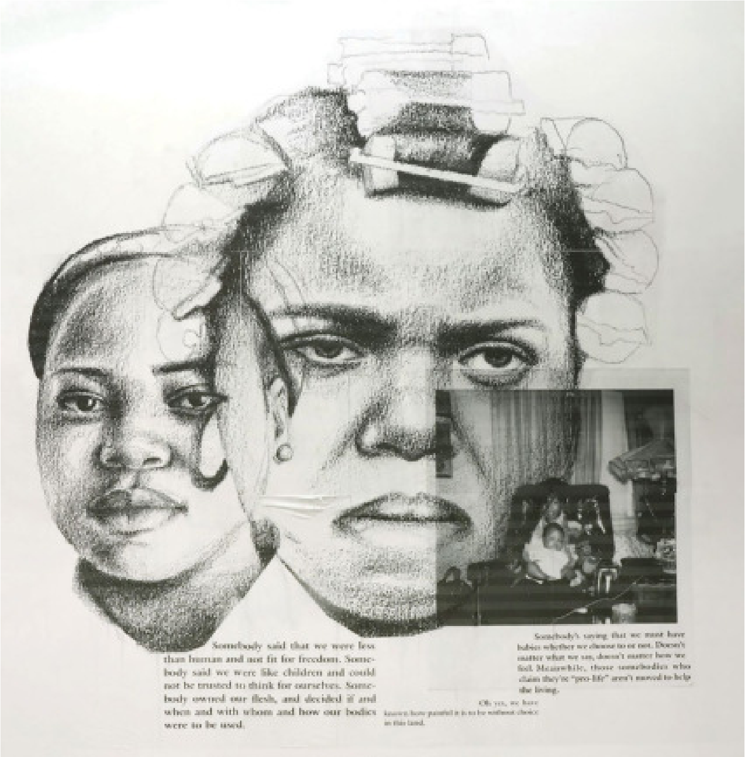
“The project started because people I thought I had everything in common with were still shocked about abortion,” Ruiz told me in an interview. Even “people who had been part of the sexual revolution: gay men who had been deeply engaged in HIV activism. They were discounting pregnant people – some of whom *are* gay men, *are* people who can get HIV – and not seeing the intersections, which serves the right.” With “Thank God for Abortion,” they said, “I wanted to send up a flare.”

“Thank God for Abortion” began as “looks” for the clubs and wearables to host parties in. It quickly grew to encompass performance, starting with “Joyful Noise,” the first-ever abortion-themed float in the 2018 NYC Pride March, and then visual art: installations and altars made from posters, flags, bullet-proof shields, and costumes, shown in both galleries and spaces for reproductive care. The titular phrase, hovering in the project’s emblem above doves and outstretched hands, is an incantation and provocation akin to what the queer collective General Idea called an “image virus.” Ruiz, who grew up Christian and identifies as Christian now, draws on both queer camp and the pageantry of Catholicism: “The church armed me for this moment.”

Their project highlights something that feels novel, but is actually a foundational truth: that abortion access, queer community, and Christianity have long been profoundly intertwined. McCorvey was referred to her lawyer, Linda Coffee, by another lawyer, Henry McCluskey, who had arranged the adoption of McCorvey’s second child (the one before the *Roe* baby). He had a reputation for taking on cases for lesbian and gay clients, and in 1969 successfully challenged a Texas statute against sodomy. The two lawyers had met at church in Dallas as children. Both were gay and young, and both were responsible for landmark litigation over choice and bodily autonomy that hinged on the right to privacy – the overlooked queer origin of the right to abortion.

To talk about abortion, urgent as that is, is to isolate an appendage on the vast body of reproductive discourse. It’s the discursive clitoris: a hot-button issue that invokes, for anyone who has ever had one, a broader system of cost, care, and access, as well as philosophical questions around what it means to “reproduce.” Biological reproduction entails not only the having and not having of children, but also sustaining oneself and others through community and care – usually unpaid “labors of love.” Our lives encompass a reproductive surround. Everywhere we look, there is aesthetic or mechanical reproduction, which refers to copying an image or object, as in the reproduction of a physical print, photo, or commodity. There is social reproduction, which names the ideological conditions that must be in place for the structures

Tatyana Fazlalizadeh: *To Be Without Choice*, 2019.



Somebody said that we were less than human and not fit for freedom. Somebody said we were like children and could not be trusted to think for ourselves. Somebody owned our flesh, and decided if and when and with whom and how our bodies were to be used.

Somebody’s saying that we must have babies whether we choose to or not. Doesn’t matter what we say, doesn’t matter how we feel. Meanwhile, those somebodies who claim they’re “pro-life” aren’t moved to help the living.

Oh yes, we have known how painful it is to be without choice in this land.

From top: Photo Carlos Hernandez; Photo Coke O’Neal

View of Ari Brielle's video installation *Screaming in the Palms of My Hands*, 2023, at Lagoon Studio, Dallas.

and institutions of power to persist. Reproduction is a condition—*the* condition—that we share.

These intertwining forms of reproduction are in many ways the subject of photographer Carmen Winant's practice. "The last safe abortion," a series she conceived during the pandemic for a 2023 exhibition at the Minneapolis Institute of Art and subsequently showed in the 2024 Whitney Biennial, documents the labor that powers abortion care. The work comprises almost 2,500 photographs of the everyday tasks and community-building activities of physicians, staff, and volunteers—answering phones, sterilizing equipment, celebrating birthdays—that keep clinics going. Installed in grids of 4-by-6-inch lab prints (the kind you might once have gotten at a drugstore), the photographs were taken over the 50-year period before the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, sourced from clinic storerooms, university archives, and personal collections, supplemented by photographs Winant took herself. Winant told me she sees "The last safe abortion" as a continuation of her work "on feminist healthcare." It follows a project on her birth and birth care work, *My Birth* (2018), as well as a project on domestic violence advocates and support workers, *Looking Forward to Being Attacked* (2018).

McCorvey herself carried out tasks like those pictured in "The last safe abortion": she had worked as a receptionist at an abortion clinic called A Choice for Women, in Dallas, in April 1995, when she made the flip to antiabortion work. McCorvey felt shunned by the mainstream feminist movement, which did not consider her a good spokesperson, and she remained fairly poor, having made very little from the advance on her book *I Am Roe* (1994) and the royalties from the made-for-TV movie *Roe vs. Wade* (1989), for which Holly Hunter won an Emmy. The Christian antiabortion organization Operation Rescue opened an office next door. McCorvey was antagonistic at first, though perhaps eventually, just lonely, for she soon began talking with Flip Benham, national director of Operation Rescue at the time, about their lives, then about the Bible. A month later, she converted. Her swimming pool baptism aired on national television.

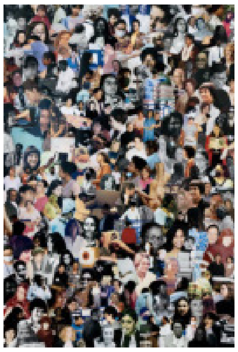
Just the previous year, a group of Black women—Dr. Toni M. Bond Leonard, Reverend Alma Crawford, Evelyn S. Field, Terri James, Bisola Marignay, Cassandra McConnell, Cynthia Newbille, Loretta Ross, Elizabeth Terry, Mable Thomas, Winnette P. Willis, and Kim Youngblood—had voiced their own critique of the mainstream feminist movement and the rhetoric of "choice," which did not account for the many women of color, poor women, disabled women, queer women, and trans people who were unable to access abortion even in places where it is legal. They coined the term "reproductive justice"—a combination of "reproductive rights" and "social justice"—that points to how something can be legal without being just. The term often focuses on abortion access, but it can also describe other forms of access, such as that to IVF and gender-affirming care, both now under increased threat.

In different ways, these two events of the mid-'90s were reckonings with all that was missed by *Roe* and the mainstream national conversation about abortion that it galvanized. Can art—wrapped up as it is in the market and reliant as it is on a shorthand that equates visibility with power—meaningfully address these inequities?

Certainly, a number of recent exhibitions grappling with art about abortion and reproductive care are taking up the task. Among them are the open-call "Currents: Abortion" (2018) at A.I.R. Gallery in Brooklyn; "On Abortion: And the Repercussions of Lack of Access" (2020) at the Museum of Sex in New York; "Reproductive: Health, Fertility, Agency" (2021) at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Photography; and "Unconditional Care" (2023) at Idaho's Lewis-Clark State College. That last show saw artworks by Michelle Hartney, Katrina Majkut, and Lydia Nobles censored under Idaho's 2021 No Public Funds for Abortion Act. Together, the shows make clear that artwork about abortion is becoming important in a way it has not been before. Yes, the art world has always moved through its topics du jour in quick succession, with frustrating shortsightedness. Nevertheless, such visibility can at least be an opportunity to channel the vast resources of the art world into supporting some kind of change.

That is the approach that Jasmine Wahi and Rebecca Pauline Jampol, codirectors of the Newark and New York nonprofit Project for Empty Space, have been taking. Their show "Abortion Is Normal" (2019–20), featured more than 50 artists in a multipart exhibition that raised more than $300,000 from the sale of artworks for the Super PAC Downtown for Democracy; it appeared first at Project for Empty Space in Newark, then at Galerie Eva Presenhuber and Arsenal Contemporary Art

Photo Diego Flores Studio/Courtesy Hignite Projects



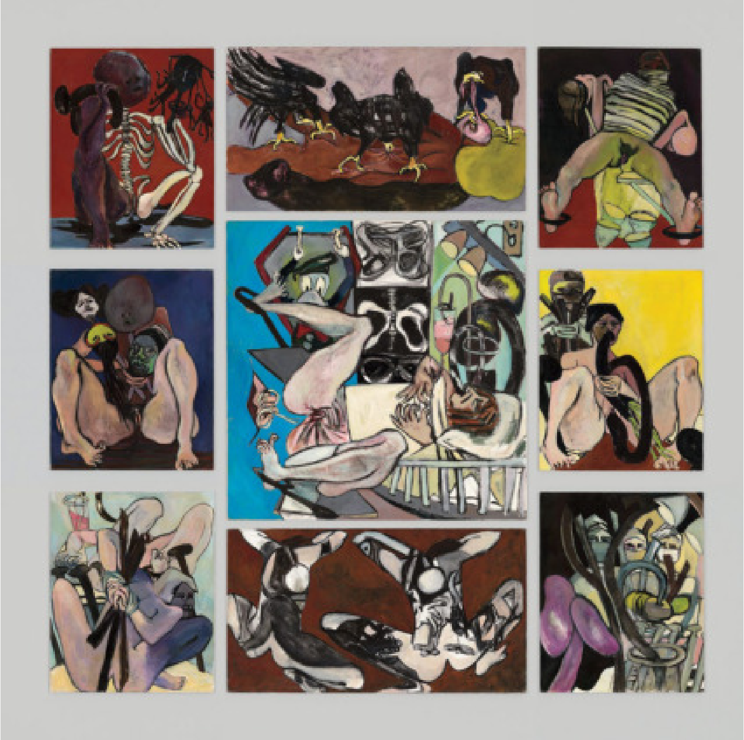
Print insert:
Carmen Winant:
Clinic Time, 2025.

in New York. The turnout was huge. The first iteration saw 30,000 people a day, "representing the mixed demographics of Downtown Newark," Wahi and Jampol recalled in an interview with me. "To put the title wall 'Abortion Is Normal' *there* sparked a number of conversations. The two exhibitions in New York also brought out thousands, reinforcing the idea that we need this content."

Their more recent traveling exhibition, "Body Freedom for Every(body)," takes place in a 27-foot-long box truck with a rotating display of more than 100 artists. Last year, it made 11 stops across the country. Like "Abortion Is Normal," "Body Freedom for Every(body)" features several blue-chip artists, but also emphasizes lesser-known queer artists and artists of color. The success of these projects – both widely covered by the press – stems perhaps from Wahi and Jampol's curatorial strategy: Leaning in to existing dynamics of visibility and power set by the market to highlight reproductive justice. "Body Freedom for Every(body)" made its last stop in Miami Beach in early December, coinciding with Miami Art Week. After all, they note, "Florida is a place that also has an abortion ban in place."

"Is It Real? Contemporary Artists Address Reproductive Freedom," an independent exhibition that opened this past October at Lagoon Studio in Dallas and hopes to travel, highlighted 31 artists and collectives (it included works by Viva Ruiz and me). Curators Emily Edwards and Sara Hignite titled the project "in homage to Juanita McNeely's essential 1969 expressionist painting about abortion, *Is It Real? Yes It Is!*, to honor the artist's legacy of feminist and disability activism, and emphasize the mirrored (sur)reality" of these pre- and post-Roe times. Expanding on this premise in an interview with me, they emphasized that "as curators living and working in Texas, it was imperative that we center Southern voices around reproductive freedom, since this had never been done before. […] Southerners live with this extreme anti-abortion legislation every day, and have for years."

One standout among many nuanced works there was Ari Brielle's three-channel video installation *Screaming in the Palm of My Hands,* which was her 2023 MFA thesis at the University of Texas at Arlington. The video intercuts live performances by Nina Simone, Beyoncé, and Sister Rosetta Tharpe with local Texas newsclips from the '80s and '90s about birth control and in vitro fertilization; and with research on Anarcha, Betsey, and Lucy, the enslaved women "experimented" on by gynecology founder Dr. J. Marion Sims. The artist also narrates her own experience of endometriosis. The result is a nonlinear exploration of Texas history, medical history, music history, and personal history. "The throughline is mothering," Brielle told me, "who I come from, but also who birthed this country."

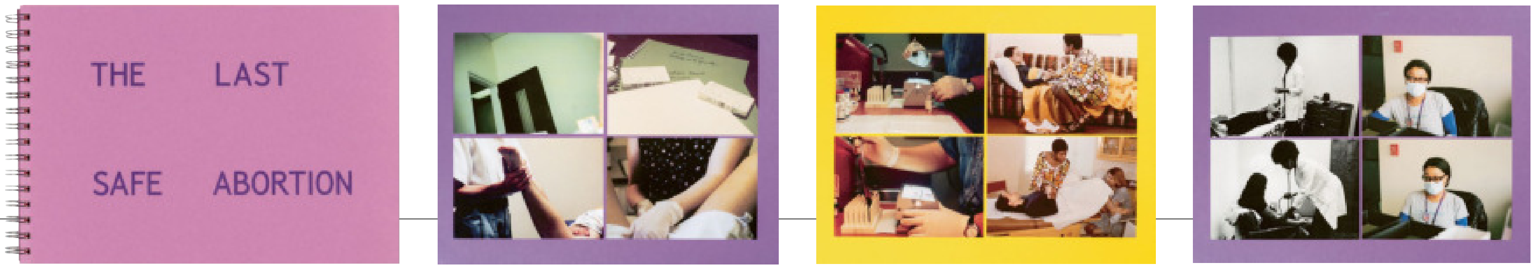


Juanita McNeely: *Is It Real? Yes, It Is!*, 1969.

Reflecting on their fellow Texan, the Dallas curators described Norma McCorvey as "someone misunderstood and spoken over her whole life. So it was important to us that artists in the show felt very seen and heard… Some of the artists said they felt like it was the first time their work was taken seriously – which has helped them keep making it." As an example, "Is It Real?" arranged for artists in the exhibition to speak at local universities, which was a way for the participating artists not only to feel heard, but to listen. Ruiz and I gave a talk at Texas Christian University, and it was moving to connect with students interested in reproductive justice there, as well as faculty navigating the current political climate to find ways to teach about it.

How do we not only *represent* reproductive justice in the art world, but *reproduce* it? This is the question at the heart of so much contemporary artwork and exhibition-making around abortion, and it is also a question that brings us back to teaching. I know of only one fine arts class currently being taught that centers these themes; it's a class called "Art about Reproductive Justice" taught by painter Luca Molnar at Stetson University in Florida (again others, please get in touch). As a private university, Stetson doesn't have the same restrictions on content as state-funded institutions; that didn't stop Governor DeSantis from having his office contact Stetson's president though, demanding that the school issue an apology after Molnar's students put together a survey asking how their peers needed support in the wake of Florida's abortion ban. (The school refused.) When I spoke to Molnar about her class, she described how content-driven rather than medium-driven art classes give students the opportunity to talk about big ideas. It made me wonder: Can reproduction itself – broadly construed – be a medium? Imagine the art world we would have if it could. ●

Carmen Winant's book *The Last Safe Abortion*, 2024.



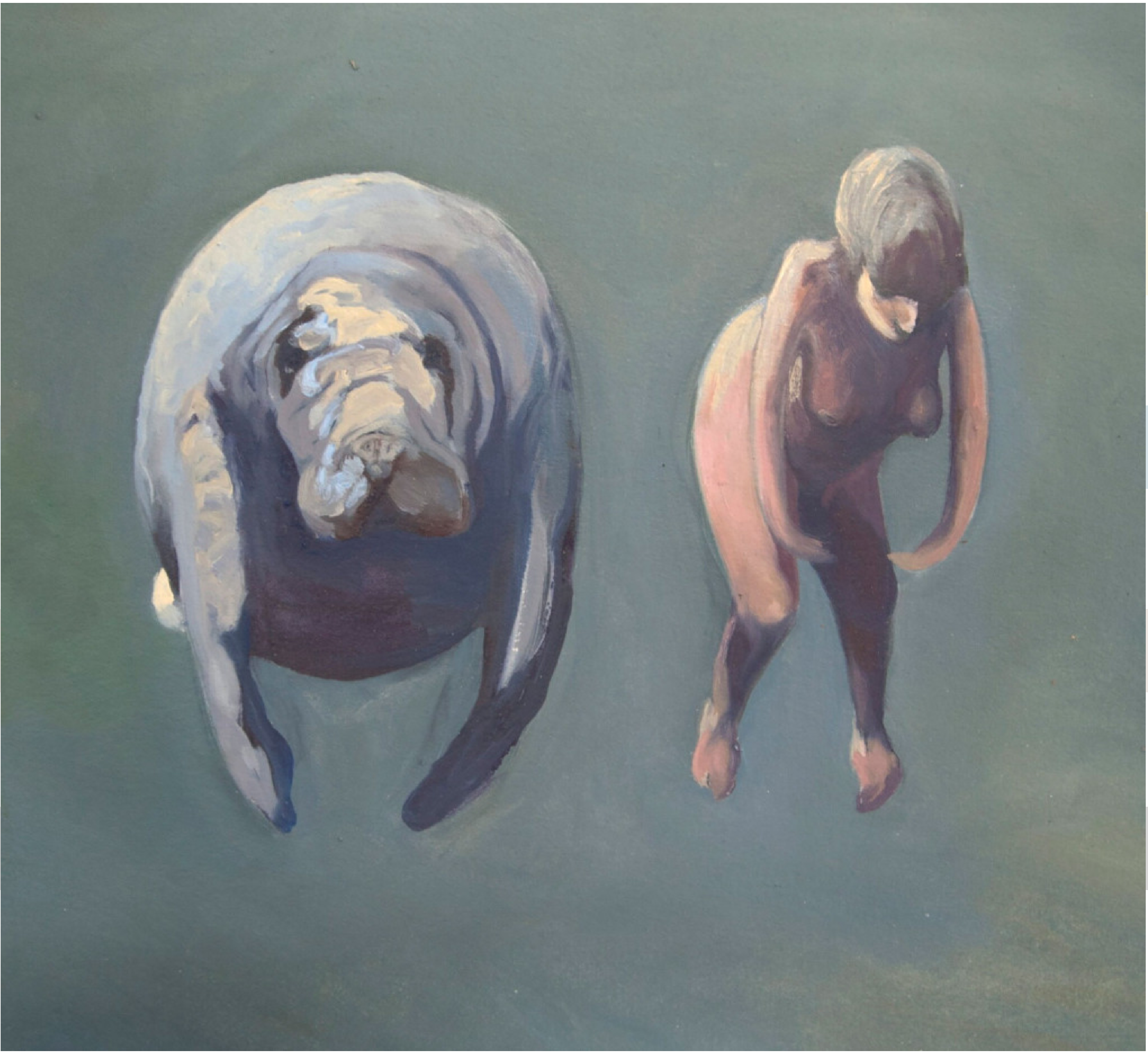
From top: ©Juanita McNeely/Courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Courtesy MACK and SPBH Editions, London

SOMETHING IN THE WATER

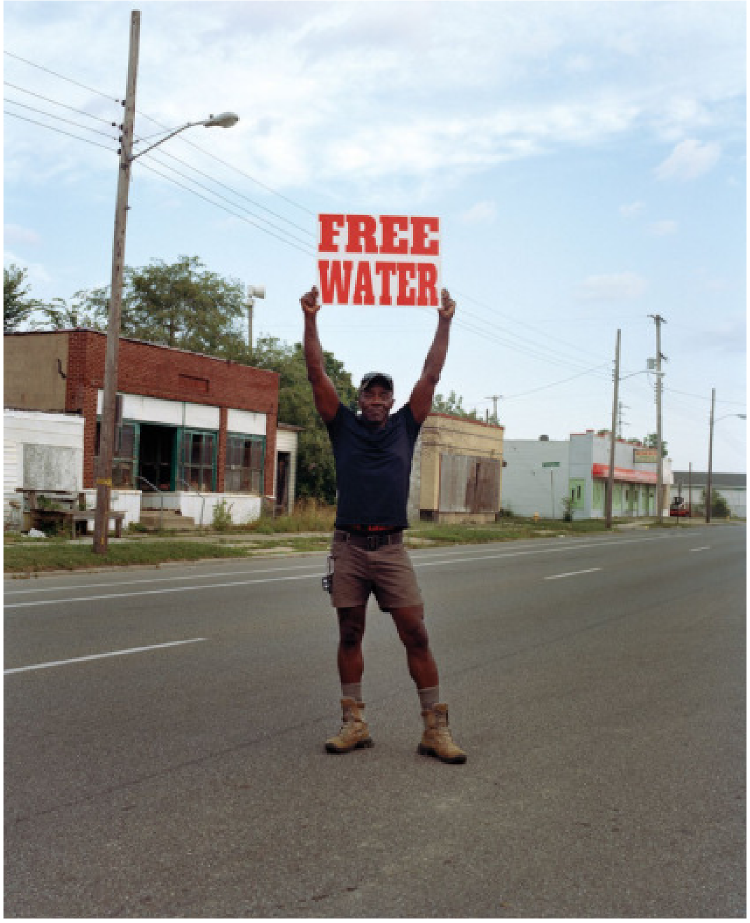
Climate change is ushering in an “Age of Disability.”

by Emily Watlington

Courtesy Sunaura Taylor



Sunaura Taylor: *Self-Portrait as Manatee*, 2013.



LaToya Ruby Frazier: *Moses West Holding a "Free Water" Sign on North Saginaw Street, Between East Marengo Avenue and East Pulaski Avenue, Flint, Michigan*, 2019.

As I write this, Los Angeles is ablaze and Accra, Ghana, is recovering from a fire; Richmond, Virginia, lost its potable water to a storm just after Asheville, North Carolina, finally got its supply back two months following Hurricane Helene. These climate disasters are having lasting impacts on, among other things, human health, dependent as it is on the health of our environment – the water we drink, the air we breathe. We are seeing whole populations, human and other, rendered disabled by chemicals and catastrophes. In her new book, *Disabled Ecologies: Lessons from a Wounded Desert* (2024), Sunaura Taylor even declares that climate change is ushering in an "Age of Disability."

Taylor, a writer and artist, was born with her own Anthropocene-era disability on Tucson's southside. There, toxic synthetic chemicals entered the groundwater by way of activities at Hughes Aircraft, a United States military contractor. By the 1970s, locals noticed that the water supply was killing their plants; their pets and livestock were ill; lupus, testicular cancer, brain tumors, and leukemia were popping up at high rates; and stillbirths and disabled newborns were unusually common.

In the course of writing her book, Taylor returned to Tucson to study not only the water that had disabled her, but the ways her community organized in response. There, she noted that while residents "told stories of often debilitating and sometimes life-ending injuries," they also mapped out "alternative modes of connection, solidarity, and resistance" that we'll need in the coming decades. This Tucsonan "vision of justice… included treatment for both human communities and landscapes." As for herself, Taylor found that her "feelings toward this water are not of fear or anxiety or anger." Instead, "they are of solidarity."

A similar "vision of justice" is echoed in LaToya Ruby Frazier's "Flint Is Family" (2016–22), a series of photographs gathered in a 2022 book. Scenes from the series comprise the standout contribution to "Breath(e): Toward Climate and Social Justice," an exhibition about health and the environment that recently traveled from the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles to the Moody Center for the Arts in Houston.

Like Taylor, Frazier knows intimately the effects that environmental pollution can have on one's body. As a child growing up in Braddock, Pennsylvania, Frazier contracted lupus in response to chemical emissions from the United States Steel Corporation that have caused illnesses in three generations of her family, some of them terminal. "Flint Is Family" is a group of striking portraits of dignified disabled residents of Flint, Michigan, organizing and proving themselves resourceful amid a water crisis. While the book mentions the effects of lead poisoning on children, as well as Flint's unusually high rates of cancer, lupus, and Legionnaires' disease, Frazier's focus is on introducing us to people who, confronted with the emotional, bodily, and economic effects of living without access to clean water, have adapted and persevered.

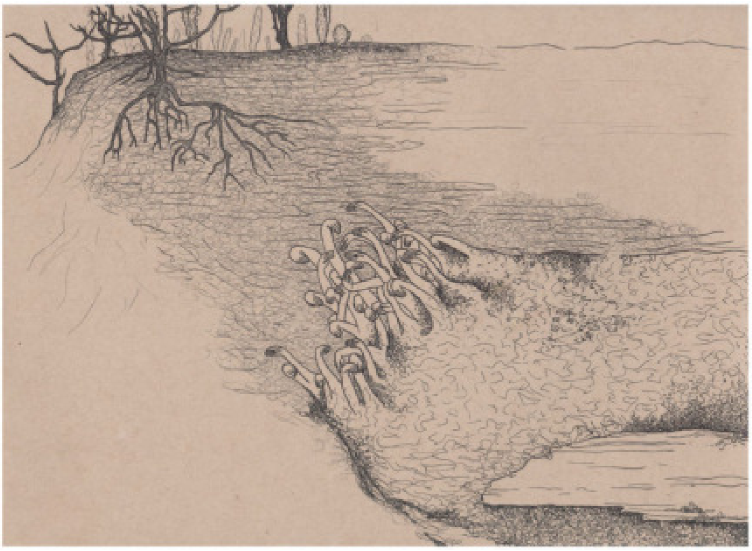
One example of resourceful perseverance comes from a Flint resident named Amber, who creates her own natural shampoo after doctor-prescribed pills and cream fail to redress the infected-looking bald spot on her daughter's head. The hair grows back in three months, and Amber begins selling her product to other Flint residents facing similar symptoms. A desire to protect their community drives her family's entrepreneurial spirit: They buy and steward land, rather than entrusting it to systems that have failed them.

The photographs do not resort to simplified clichés of what sickened or impoverished people look like. What comes through instead is resourcefulness and resilience, persistence and creative adaptation.

Taylor's and Frazier's books are both primarily portraits of communities – how they come together and adapt, how they organize. This community focus is fitting, for if there is one thing both disability and ecology reveal, it is how incredibly interdependent we all are.

If, as Taylor writes, "the future is disabled," that disabled future is already here; but, to paraphrase William Gibson, it's just not evenly distributed – owing largely to environmental racism. Tucson's southside is predominantly Mexican American, while Flint is majority Black. Poverty, meanwhile, is America's fourth leading risk factor for death, per the American Medical Association: It follows only heart disease, cancer, and smoking.

Sunaura Taylor: *Aquifer Losing Reach*, 2017–20.



From top: Courtesy LaToya Ruby Frazier and Gladstone Gallery; Courtesy Sunaura Taylor

Frazier and Taylor did more than document the ways their communities are adapting: they modeled new ways to get actively involved. For Frazier's part, after three years of photographing Flint, she found she "could no longer idly stand by and wait for the government to do its job." This was in 2019, after all the criminal charges against city and state employees were dropped, even as residents remained saddled with hefty utility bills for undrinkable water. The artist turned to Amber, asking what could be done.

Amber told Frazier about an invention by a man named Moses West: an atmospheric water generator that could collect clean water by extracting condensation from the air. It runs on solar power and generates water perpetually. Being off-grid, it does not require the kinds of governmental infrastructure the community had rightly grown to distrust.

The catch was that this contraption weighs 26,000 pounds, and had to be shipped from Puerto Rico, where West lived: This was costly, around $50,000. So Frazier chose to offer money from sales following her recent exhibition at the gallery Gavin Brown's Enterprise in New York; the donation was matched by a grant from the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation. In Frazier's photos, the generator's arrival in 2019 appears triumphant.

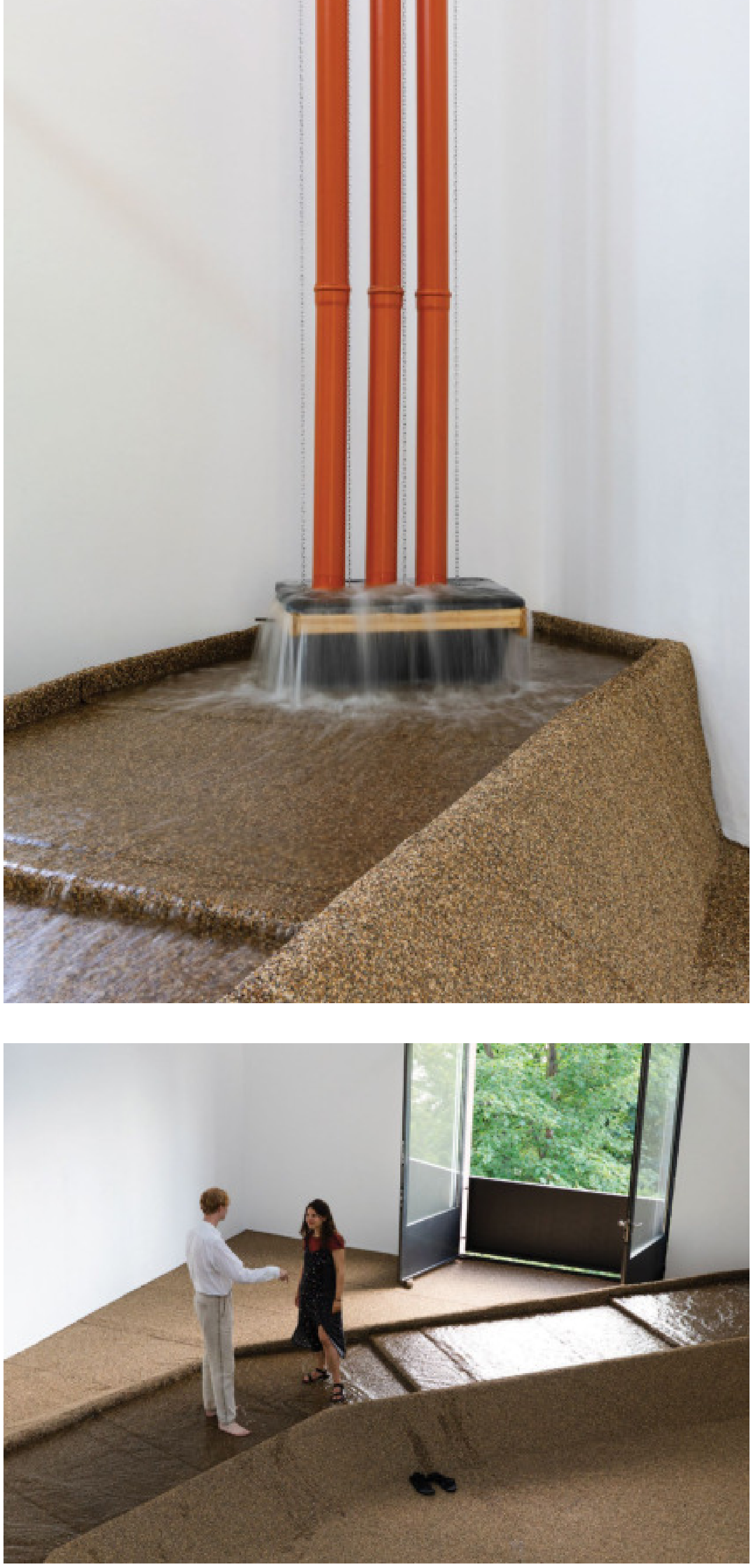
The final "Flint Is Family" photos were shot in color. In her 2022 book, these colors burst brightly against the sequence's black-and-white buildup, as if leaving Kansas for Oz. We see residents relishing the atmospheric water generator, the water, and one another. They are hugging and beaming and praying in front of the green rectangular apparatus, filling jugs, playing in sprinklers, drinking from the spout.

But it's not all rainbows and sunshine post-generator. The machine gets vandalized anonymously, though it is quickly repaired. Still, the instance seems to affirm suspicions that the water crisis was more intentional than simply neglect or ineptitude, more than lack of funds or inevitable environmental degradation. "It crossed my mind that they want us to die off and then redevelop," says a Flint resident named Melvin. Certainly, making land unlivable is a tried-and-true tactic of dispossession, as Taylor details in *Disabled Ecologies*, referring to the colonization of the Americas. Still, Melvin dwells less on intent than he does on taking power back into his own hands: "My advice to Black people in Flint is, don't move away,

Photos documenting Ekene Ijeoma's ongoing project *Black Forest* in Melvindale, Mich., 2022– (below) and St. Louis, Mo., 2023– (bottom).

Black Forest

Photos Tony Eggert/Courtesy Black Forest (2)



Two views of Asad Raza's installation *Diversion*, 2022, at Portikus, Frankfurt.

let's build it up and let's buy property."

We'll need the kinds of creative and communal adaptation Melvin describes in order to survive and care for one another amid this mass multispecies disablement, especially under a federal administration that appears unlikely to help. "Flint Is Family" is successful as an art project for the way it makes this resiliency visible in a climate where, for many people, survival is assumed, struggle is left outside the frame, and water is taken for granted.

Two other recent artworks stand out as modeling how we might adapt, tending to our health and to our environment too. The first is Ekene Ijeoma's *Black Forest* (2022–), a project that will see the planting of 40,000 trees in Black neighborhoods across the United States. The trees bear tags that read "Black Forest: a living monument and archive for Black lives lost to Covid-19" alongside a QR code that links to a crowd-sourced archive. The trees foster the health of Black neighborhoods and residents by helping mitigate warming temperatures, offering shade, and cleaning the air.

Ijeoma was inspired in part by the Neighborhood Tree Corps, founded by activist Hattie Carthan, who became known as "Bed-Stuy's Tree Lady." In the 1960s, Carthan planted more than 1,500 trees throughout Brooklyn, many thriving today. *Black Forest* also responds to 2020 reports that Black people were twice as likely to die from Covid as white people; living in tree-lined rather than redlined neighborhoods benefits the respiratory system.

In making *Black Forest* an art project rather than merely an environmental action – labor likely to go unnoticed – Ijeoma draws attention not only to how environmental racism distributes vegetation unevenly, but to the human hand behind the intervention, showing that ordinary people can intervene, too. The sleekly designed Black Forest tags call attention to this, as do the community events during which the trees are planted, on both public land and volunteered private property. "For some people, this will be the first time they've planted a tree," Ijeoma told the *Art Newspaper.* "That alone is a profound experience" – a reminder of the agency we have over our environment.

That agency was present too in Asad Raza's 2022 exhibition "Diversion," which saw the artist reroute Frankfurt's Main River to

Moses West with his atmospheric water generator in Jackson, Miss., in 2022.

From left: Photos Diana Pfammatter/Courtesy Portikus, Frankfurt (2); Courtesy Moses West Foundation flow through Kunsthalle Portikus, located on a small island in the river. The water streamed into one of the museum's galleries, where it was passed through a very fine coffee filter and boiled before an attendant added minerals. This simple intervention made the water drinkable; museum visitors were invited to partake, and thereby reconnect to their environs.

Of course, the idea of agency may seem paltry when you consider that 70 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions can be traced back to just 100 companies. But as Canadian author and activist Naomi Klein argues, "the pessimism of some who believe in climate change is just as detrimental as those who deny it outright." Here, environmentalism might take a cue from disability politics, which centers accommodating and caring for people in whatever their state rather than finding a cure.

Instead, the mainstream environmental movement has had a thorny relationship to disability justice. As Taylor details in *Disabled Ecologies*, environmentalists have a habit of enlisting disabled people to monger fear or as a cautionary tale: Better protect your environment and your health, so you don't end up *disabled.* One side effect is stigma perpetuated, with disability framed as a personal tragedy and not a political failure.

Taylor suggests the two movements team up – and shows they weren't always so separate. She writes that for over a century in the United States, environmental protection and human health were grouped under the same governmental branch, until 1970, when Richard Nixon founded the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). He got a lot of reputational points for the EPA, and for pouring money into the National Cancer Institute as well. But the moves in the end benefited corporations: separating the two endeavors saw a *decrease* in environmental cancer studies, and in researching the chemicals that cause disease. Paradoxically, Taylor notes, all this happened on the heels of Rachel Carson's bestsellers, particularly *Silent Spring* (1962), which had placed the health effects of synthetic chemicals on the mainstream mind.

So still today, in the US, chemicals are innocent until proven toxic. Whether testing forever chemicals or microplastics, you and I are the lab rats. This uncontrolled pollution that puts profit over people is the enemy, not disability.

The coming decades, Taylor suggests, might look something like the revenge fantasy in Audre Lorde's 1980 book *Cancer Journals*, where an army of single-breasted women gathers at the Capitol Building to protest chemical contamination, their bodies the evidence. The changing climate, Taylor writes, is starting to resemble "something impaired, precarious, dependent, filled with loss and struggle, requiring assistance, accommodation, and creative forms of care." And so disabled people – experts in all these things – "should be sought out as leaders in climate adaptation conversations."

Charles Darwin noted something similar. In *The Origin of Species*, his focus was not only on "the survival of the fittest," Taylor reminds us, "but on variation as the driver of life." For Darwin, it was not exactly the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent – to say nothing of the wealthiest. Rather, it is the ones who are most adaptable. If you want to know more about creative adaptation, Taylor suggests, ask a disabled person. ●

Courtesy LaToya Ruby Frazier/Gladstone Gallery

LaToya Ruby Frazier: *Zion Taking Her First Sip of Water from the Atmospheric Water Generator with Her Mother Shea Cobb on North Saginaw Street Between East Marengo Avenue and East Pulaski Avenue, Flint, Michigan*, 2019.

Photo Amanda Villarosa

Well Wishes

In the studio with Shana Moulton.

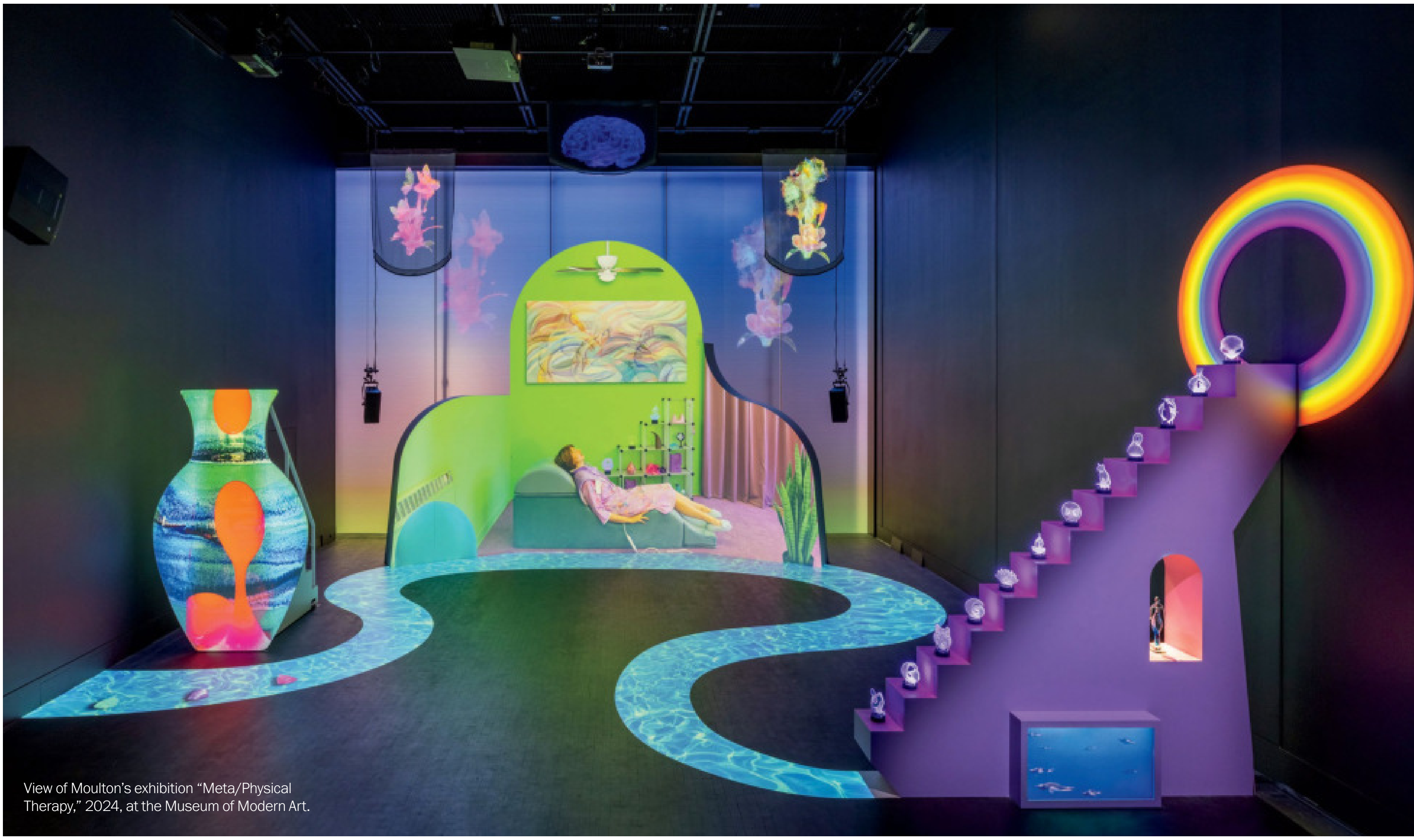
interview by Zsofi Valyi-Nagy

studio photography by Amanda Villarosa

Shana Moulton's studio at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she has chaired the art department since July 2024, is painted a saturated pastel green – a shade that is, in the artist's words, "just good enough a green to green screen with." The studio doubled as a set for the videos in "Meta/Physical Therapy," Moulton's exhibition last spring at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which centered around a video installation starring Moulton's semi-autobiographical alter ego, Cynthia, a middle-aged white hypochondriac with an unfortunate bob and a forlorn look in her eyes. Stepping in to Moulton's studio is like entering a New Age physical therapy office, with its modular furniture, jewel-toned gadgets, and eccentric array of objects easily at home in a roadside crystal shop or megamall gadget store.

Moulton's objects are more than props. They "take on a life of their own," she told *Art21* in 2014. Her breakthrough video series "Whispering Pines" (2002–18), a 10-part lo-fi monodrama that screened in the artist's retrospective last fall at the Buffalo Institute for Contemporary Art, introduced Cynthia as she attempts to self-soothe by coveting product after product, from a miniature fountain to an Avon reflexology glove. The objects in Cynthia's home are animated in an Adobe After Effects fever dream, collapsing her digital and analog worlds. Named after the Oakhurst, California, senior citizen mobile home park where Moulton grew up, "Whispering Pines" marries 1980s kitsch and New Age aesthetics. A hemorrhoid pillow sewn into a lilac dress contains a portal to another world, and the art of floral arrangement, set to an instrumental Enya cover, becomes an alchemical act. Twenty years after the birth of Cynthia, Moulton—now middle-aged herself—continues to embody this character to explore products and exercises promising pain relief, most recently in a series of performances created in collaboration with composer Nick Hallett.

On an uncharacteristically rainy Saturday in Santa Barbara this past November, Moulton showed off some of her beloved gadgets, and led me around her favorite buildings on the same Super Handy scooter that Cynthia used to glide around the stage in "Meta/Physical Therapy." Below, she discusses hypochondria, hospital art, and the absurdity of wellness consumerism.


View of Moulton's exhibition "Meta/Physical Therapy," 2024, at the Museum of Modern Art.

Zsofi Valyi-Nagy: You have such an incredible collection of objects. Which one is your favorite right now?

Shana Moulton: This Visible Woman toy doll that I got as a 5-year-old. I used this in one of my first performances as an undergrad at Berkeley, in 1998. It comes with organs: You paint them and you put her body together. In that performance, I filled the doll with glittery, rainbow fishing lure worms that my dad used to hide around the house. Then I removed the worms, in a kind of surgery, one by one.

My professor, Kevin Radley, who was such a big influence on me, helped me film it, and we projected a close-up of that over me. That was actually my first projection performance. Much later, I did a performance at Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI) when I first moved to New York, and I filmed the removal of the actual organs. I projected the sequence over my body and I sang the song from *The Last Unicorn*, "Now that I'm a woman, everything is strange."

Do you mind handing me that pyramid [*pointing*]? I've been collecting examples of orgonite, which is based on Dr. Wilhelm Reich's orgone energy. Orgonite is meant to balance energy or protect you from negative frequencies. It's made of metal, usually copper, and crystals, suspended in resin. I'm trying to make my own.

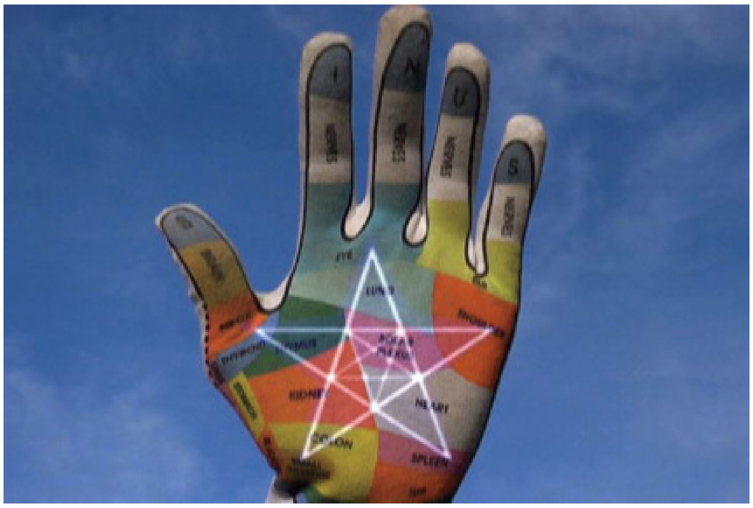
ZSVN: What's your relationship to this energetic shield stuff?

SM: I think there's always more to what's going on than we know, or can know. I don't know how to use crystals, and I haven't studied them, but I'm sure there's something to them, and I feel the same with orgonite.

ZSVN: Growing up in California, did you have a lot of exposure to New Age culture?

SM: Sort of. I grew up in the Bible Belt of California, but I started to seek those things out on my own in the public library before there was the internet. When I went to college at Berkeley in the '90s, that's when I really encountered it. My roommate was into something that I think was called the Mother Wave, and she met someone who spoke to dolphins (they also claimed to be in the FBI). And of course, we went to Burning Man three times in a row.

A still from *Whispering Pines 4*, 2007.



From top: Photo Jonathan Dorado/©Museum of Modern Art, New York; Courtesy the artist

Moulton and Nick Hallett's collaborative performance *Meta/Physical Therapy*, 2024, at the Museum of Modern Art.

ZSVN: Was there an aversion to mysticism in the community where you grew up?

SM: I would say anything outside of Christianity was considered satanic, and there just wasn't a lot of awareness of other spiritualities. Luckily, my parents were not religious and I wasn't a part of that. And my dad's brother was an astrologer.

Shells, gems, and pill cases are just some of the items dotting a table in Moulton's studio.

From top: ©Museum of Modern Art, New York; Photo Amanda Villarosa

ZSVN: Is that Chuck Moulton, who did the natal chart in the Bio section of your website?

SM: Yeah, when I was born, he did my chart. He passed away when I was a sophomore in college, after going into a coma. After that, I got to know more about his life as a poet and astrologer through his friends in Fresno.

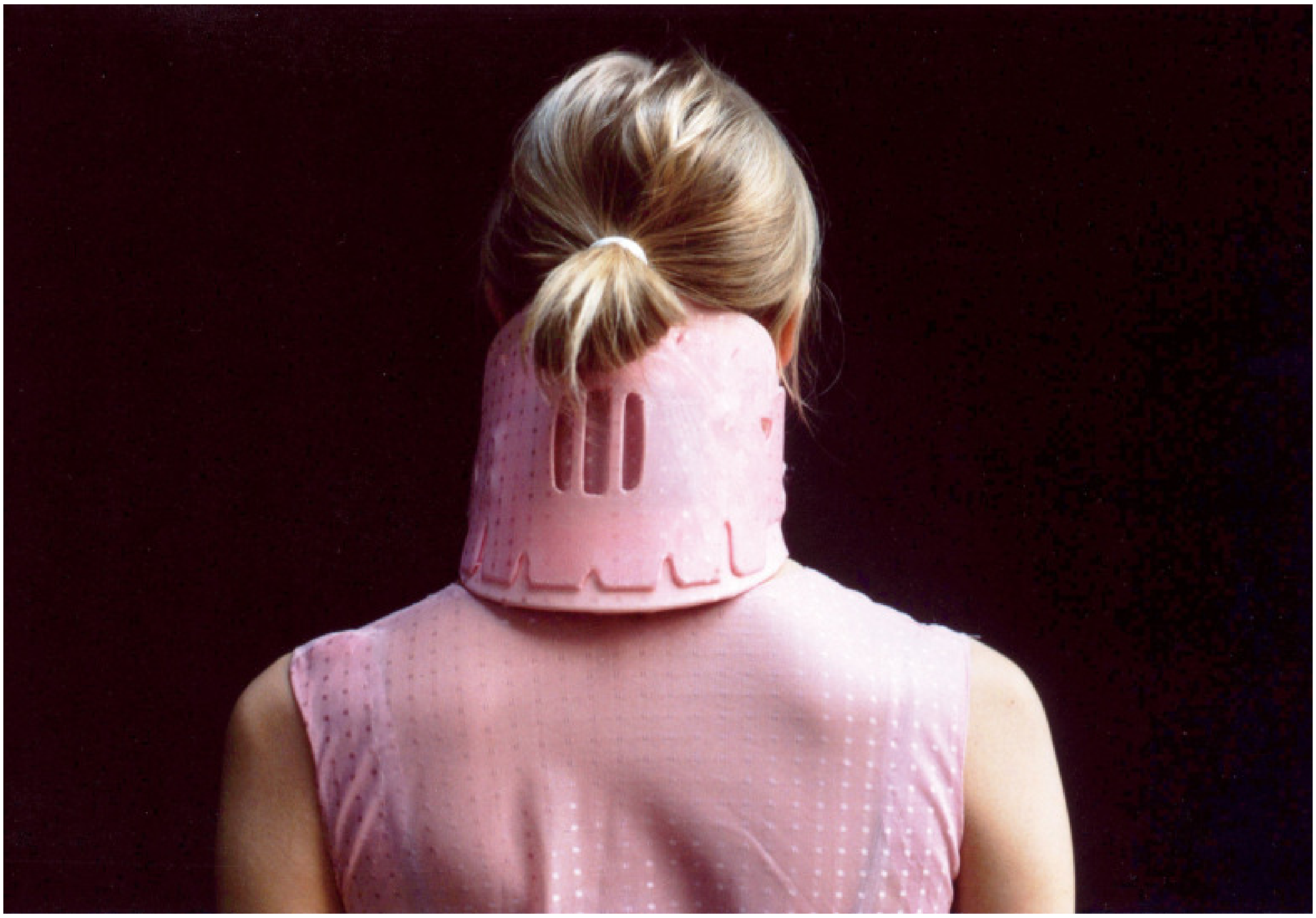
ZSVN: These spinal decompression devices are so beautiful. What are you planning to use them for?

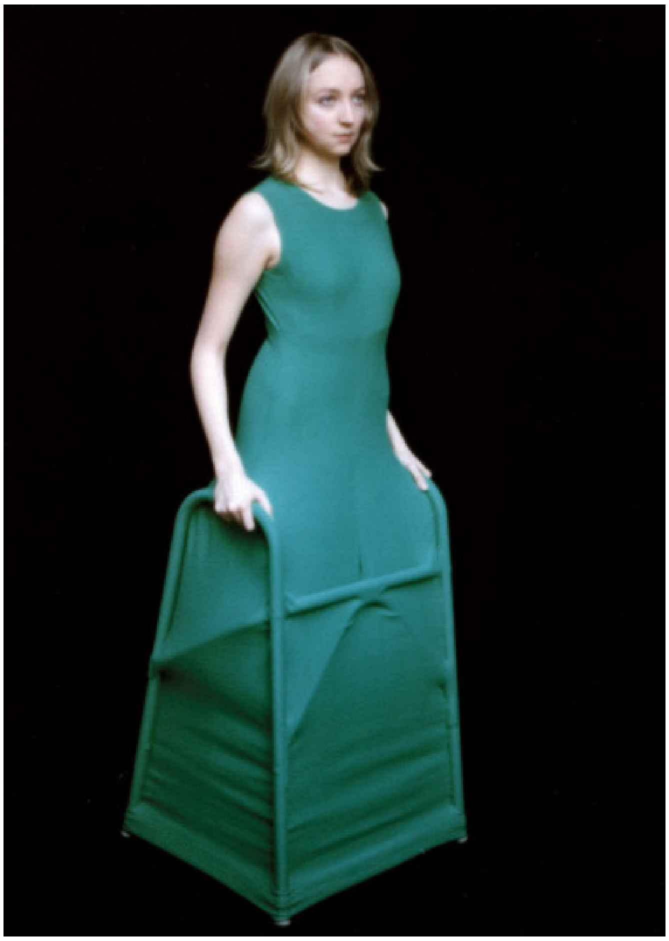
SM: Whenever I have a budget, it's also an excuse to buy things that I would use anyway, so I thought these could help my head and neck pain. Not that I'm good about using them.

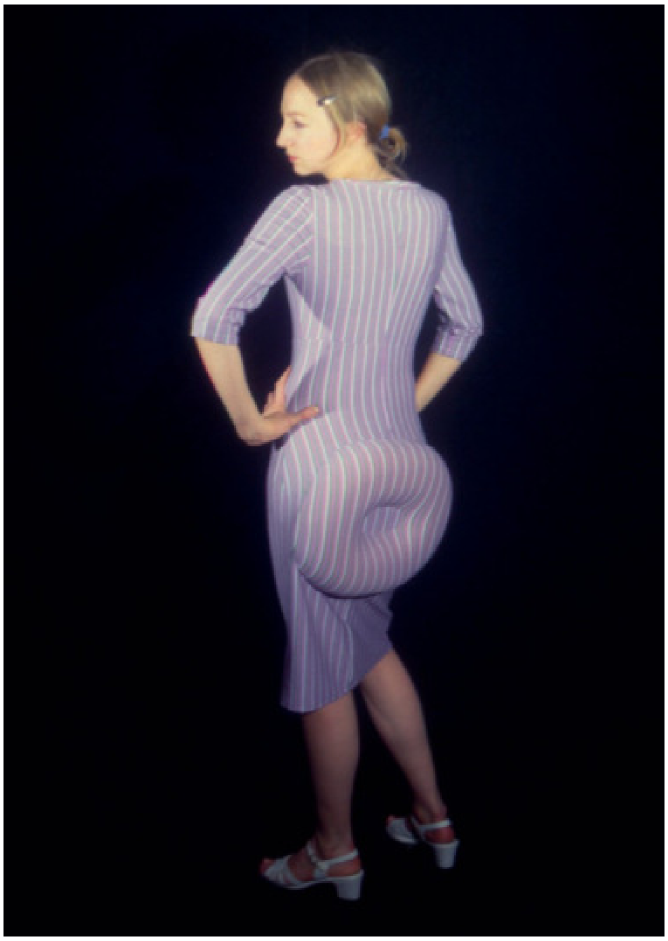
ZSVN: In your Art21 video, you talk about your hypochondria and about always asking yourself "do I really have this?" That resonated with me, because even though I have a diagnosis, I sometimes still don't believe it myself. I've gaslit myself into thinking that I tricked my doctor into diagnosing me, because the diagnostic process for hypermobile Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (hEDS) is so subjective. I've had so many experiences of misdiagnosis and medical gaslighting, but the experiences have been generative for my art practice.

SM: Exactly. Someone just asked me, how are you making work with this limitation? But actually, it's creative fodder. I didn't really have a choice, I had to make it a part of the work, because it's a performance, and it's about the body.

ZSVN: Can I ask where the neck braces came from that Cynthia wears in *Whispering Pines*? I love how they're embellished and match her dresses. Did you have to wear the neck brace, or was that just part of the character?







Moulton modeling three garments from her series “Medical Dresses,” 2001–02. Clockwise from left, *Neck Brace Dress*, *Hemorrhoid Pillow Dress*, and *Walker Dress*, all 2001–02.

Photos Adam Davies (3)

SM: I began my series "Medical Dresses" (2001–02)—dresses with medical devices sewn into them – in grad school. I think the neck braces were gifts, but the walker and blood pressure tester were my grandparents'. The hemorrhoid pillow was a thrift store find. At the time, weirdly, I was thinking about bipedalism, because I studied physical anthropology in college, and how strange and difficult it is for us to be bipedal. I was thinking about whether bipedalism was related to consciousness and about gravity and frailty. I was looking at Rebecca Horn and other artists who were extending the body: Matthew Barney and Hussein Chalayan, the fashion designer who did those great coffee table dresses.

I stopped using those dresses after a few years, because, at a certain point, it felt like it wasn't my territory. Although the medical devices were things that I was likely to use at some point in my life, I didn't yet have personal experience with them. I still want to go back to costume and body appendages, especially now that it *is* becoming personal. I've had this sock aid forever—I love its form, which is such a mystery—and now, I could really use it, because with my hip pain, putting on socks and shoes is one of the hardest things for me. And if I do wind up getting a hip replacement, I'll be wearing this hip abductor pillow that I love. Some of these things that I collected are weirdly becoming relevant.

ZSVN: Do you think growing up in a senior citizen community had an impact on your work?

SM: Part of it was going to the hospital for my uncle and then visiting my grandparents in the hospital as they aged, and when they were ill at home. Growing up in the senior park, I was really paranoid that my parents would get sick because they were slightly older than my classmates' parents. Back then, my dad was the kind of person who would accidentally cut himself and we'd be like, "Dad, there's blood all over you!" And he'd be like, "Oh, I didn't notice!" So maybe my sense of hypochondria comes from my dad thinking I was overreacting. If I got a scrape on my knee, I'd walk around with a limp. I was really careful because I didn't want to get hurt as a kid. I don't like pain.

ZSVN: I can relate to that, taking the smallest wounds or symptoms so seriously and recovering from a cold like it's my job.

SM: I mean, with the internet, it's such a trip to be able to look up symptoms. It's terrifying, it's empowering, it's self-sabotage in some cases, and it's anxiety producing.

ZSVN: In *Whispering Pines 4* (2007), Cynthia is typing on her desktop computer, logging her symptoms in her diary. But the physical act of looking up carpal tunnel on the internet is exacerbating her carpal tunnel. It reminded me of spending hours scrolling on my phone for the gadget that's going to cure my neck pain, and in that time, only making the pain worse. You capture that infinite scroll in "Meta/Physical Therapy" as well – the web browser takes on a life of its own, leaking into the physical realm and washing over Cynthia.

SM: What a pleasure it is to seek out these things that might solve or soothe whatever ails us. I grew up on Harriet Carter and Lillian Vernon catalogs, which were like proto–Sky Mall. I had all the gadgets, including things that you might apply to your body; those were the things I was looking at as a kid. But now it's endless. There are so many things, and a lot of them are marketed through the algorithm. Now I don't even have to look for them; they just come to me. I recently got this overpriced gadget called Sensate. It stimulates your vagus nerve in time with meditation music from an app. But of course, to access all the soundscapes, you have to pay $50 a year on top of the $300 gadget. I rationalized the purchase by thinking I would use it in work, but I just use it to relax.

Moulton in her Santa Barbara, Calif., studio.

Photo Amanda Villarosa

A still from *Whispering Pines 5*, 2005.

Courtesy the artist

ZSVN: I love how you use arts grants to buy objects that are probably FSA eligible. I always get ads for wellness start-ups, which remind me of the Avon lady/healer in *Whispering Pines 4* (2007) and the multilevel marketing scheme that is happening there. What do you make of this subculture that you encountered in the '90s entering the mainstream?

> “I'm also poking fun at my demographic to an extent, and it seems like it's been gentle enough that people can relate. Humor is such an important strategy for navigating trauma and illness and tragedy.”

SM: In college, my roommate spent the money to do Transcendental Meditation (TM), and I remember being skeptical of that at the time. Years later, I finally listened to so much of David Lynch talking about TM that I was like, OK, now I can afford it, so I'm going to try it. I do think meditation is the answer to a lot, but the rigorous 20 minutes twice a day just didn't work for me. You had to keep buying things that felt Scientology-adjacent, so that eventually turned me off. I do feel like there is lot of snake oil out there.

ZSVN: I'm curious about your relationship to Cynthia. Does it feel different to explore aspects of yourself that you're maybe a little ashamed of, such as your hypochondriacal tendencies, through a character?

SM: It does. Some of Cynthia's experiences were intertwined with issues my mom was having. More recently, they relate to my hip issues and some of the embarrassing aspects of that. It took me a while to get the confidence to ride this scooter around campus. Sometimes I use a cane and I think back to my grandma, who had arthritis and yet would never touch any of these things. I sometimes feel like I'm weaker than her. I think the MoMA piece was maybe a way to process that shame.

I'm also poking fun at my demographic to an extent, and it seems like it's been gentle enough that people can relate. Humor is such an important strategy for navigating trauma and illness and tragedy.

“Whispering Pines” also came out of poking fun at the art world, at the idea of high and low art. But now it's a totally different art world.

Cynthia is loosely based on my experience of looking in the mirror and having existential dread, or working on improving myself, and trying to take that all less seriously. But she's not an everyperson—so many people don't have the privilege to just think about themselves for hours at a time.

ZSVN: That's true, but according to the Centers for Disease Control, one out of every four people will experience disability at some point in their life, at least when they age. Your work explores the aesthetics of aging; you find beauty and style in the senior aisle of the drugstore.

SM: I like things that are designed to soothe ill people. I mean, it's similar to things that are designed for babies, the pastels and the soft biomorphic shapes. Who doesn't like that?

If a hospital is designed well, I could spend all day there. I love a good hospital. The art they have in hospitals is usually really beautiful to me.

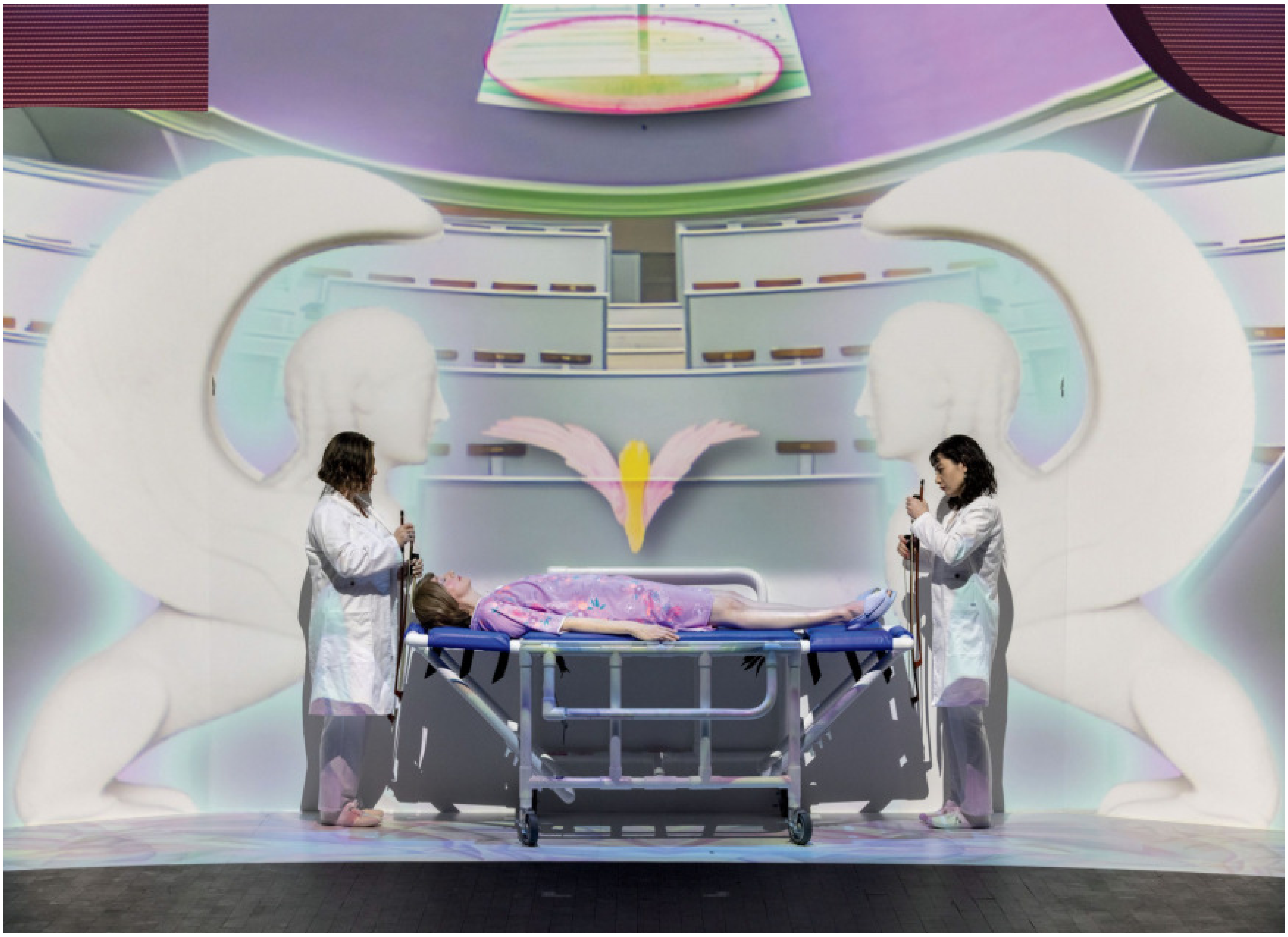
ZSVN: There's this self-help book that you reference in *Whispering Pines 5* (2005) called *The Feeling Good Handbook* (1989) by David D. Burns, MD. He talks about negative thoughts and their detrimental effects on the body. Cynthia is reading a chapter titled "You can change the way you feel." I'm fully behind the mind-body connection, but there's a toxic positivity to this language that makes you wonder if chronic pain and illness are your own fault.

SM: I've had that thought so many times. Having made work about something and then gotten the symptoms or the illness that it was connected to, I'm like, "Oh, my God, did I make that happen?" My mom encountered a lot of that "mind over matter" attitude when she was sick. "Oh, you just have to have a good attitude and think positive," and "it's your emotions that have created this." Or "you just have to eat completely pure food" – *to cure stage four cancer*. It made me really upset when she got that kind of advice. I do think there are a lot of pollutants in what we eat, but I don't like this sense of shame that comes with not being perfect.

ZSVN: When I watched the very first video featuring Cynthia, *Whispering Pines 1* (2002), as she's walking into the grocery store in her hemorrhoid pillow dress and examining this can of beans, I identified so much with her feeling of self-pity, but also with her *hope* that this product might help her feel better. Every time I try something new—a new product or a new method—I'm so optimistic.

SM: Yeah, it's like a high. You get addicted to that feeling of hope. ●

View of Moulton and Hallett's collaborative performance *Meta/Physical Therapy*, 2024, at the Museum of Modern Art.



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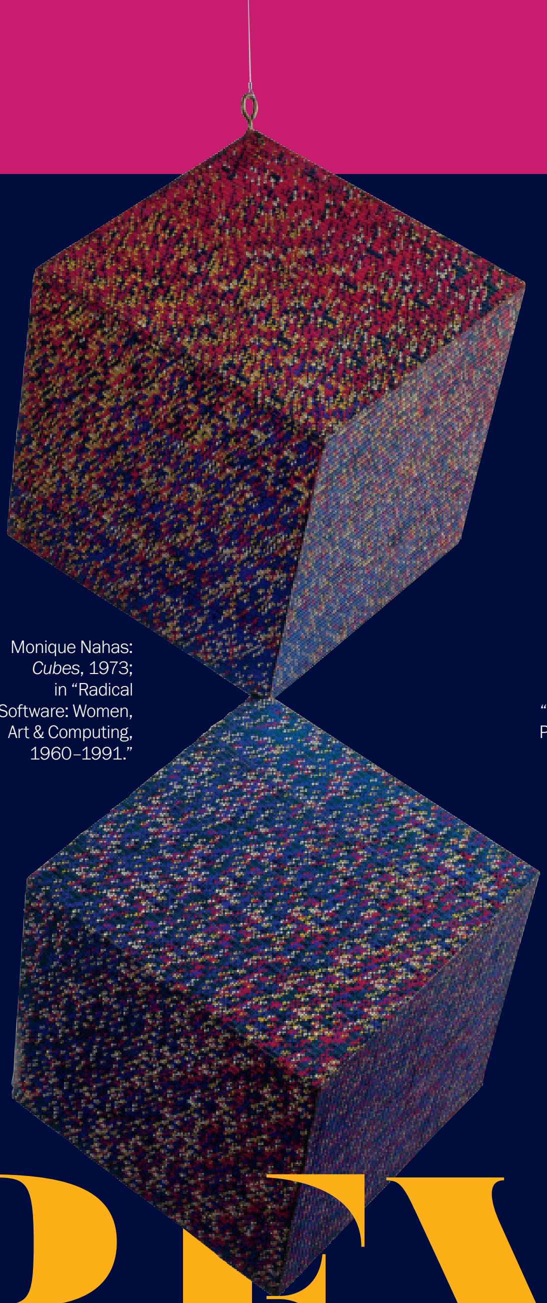
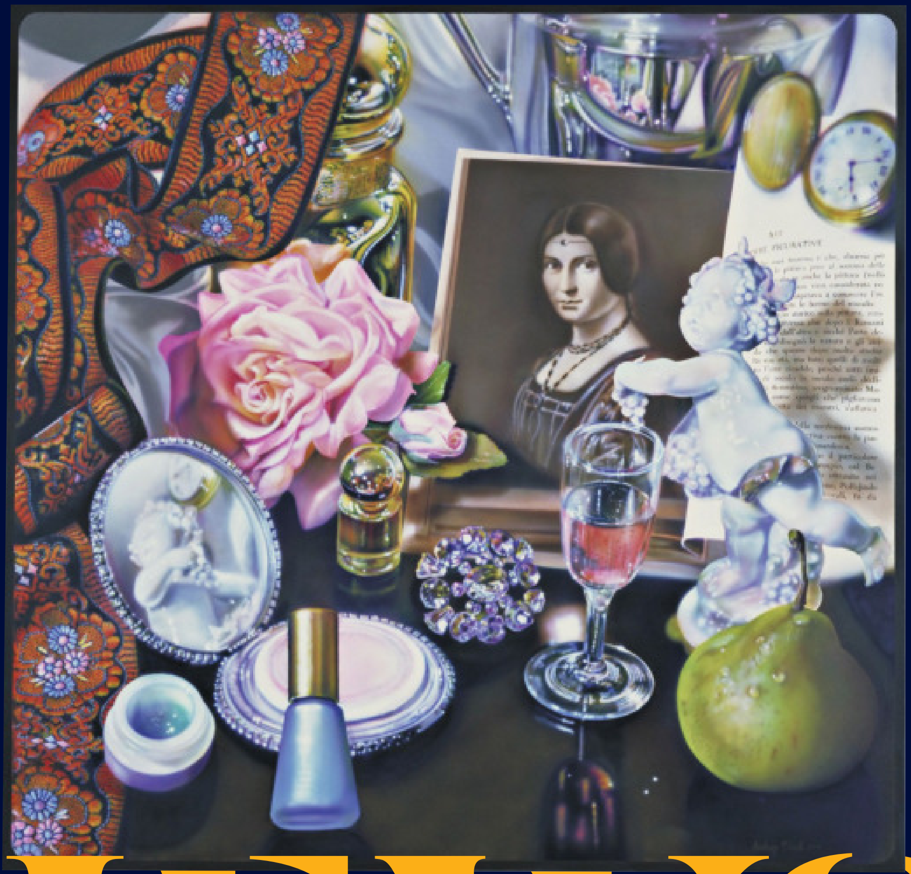
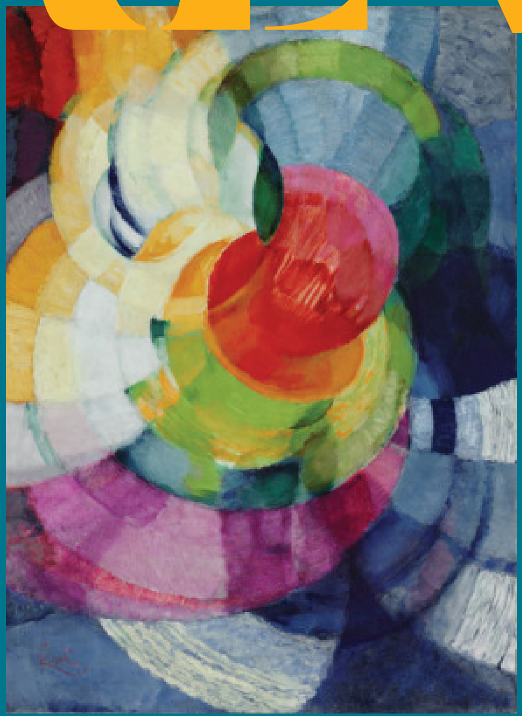


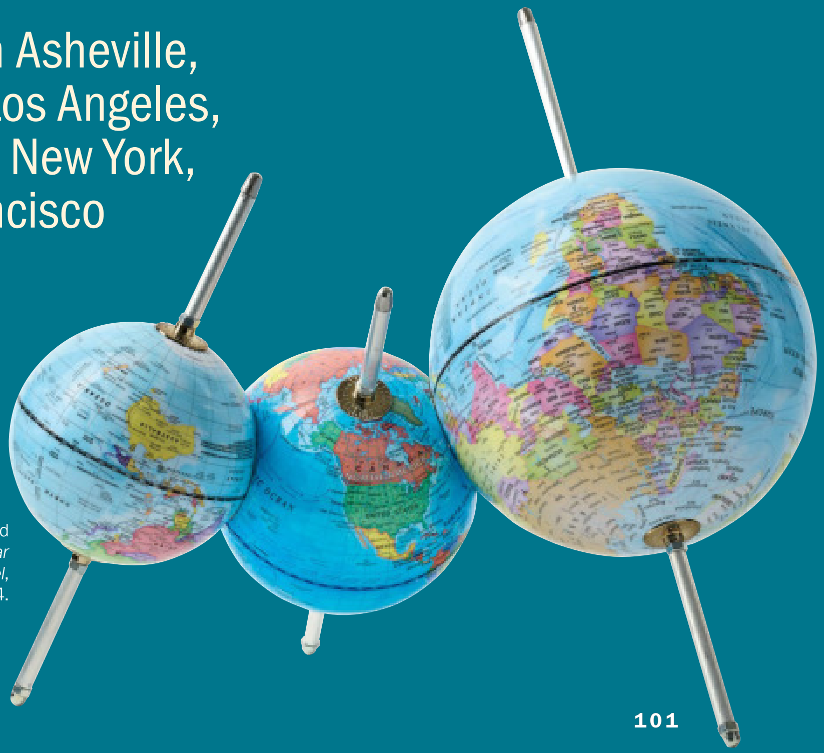
Monique Nahas: *Cubes*, 1973; in "Radical Software: Women, Art & Computing, 1960–1991."



Audrey Flack: *Leonardo's Lady*, 1974; in "Ordinary People: Photorealism and the Work of Art since 1968."

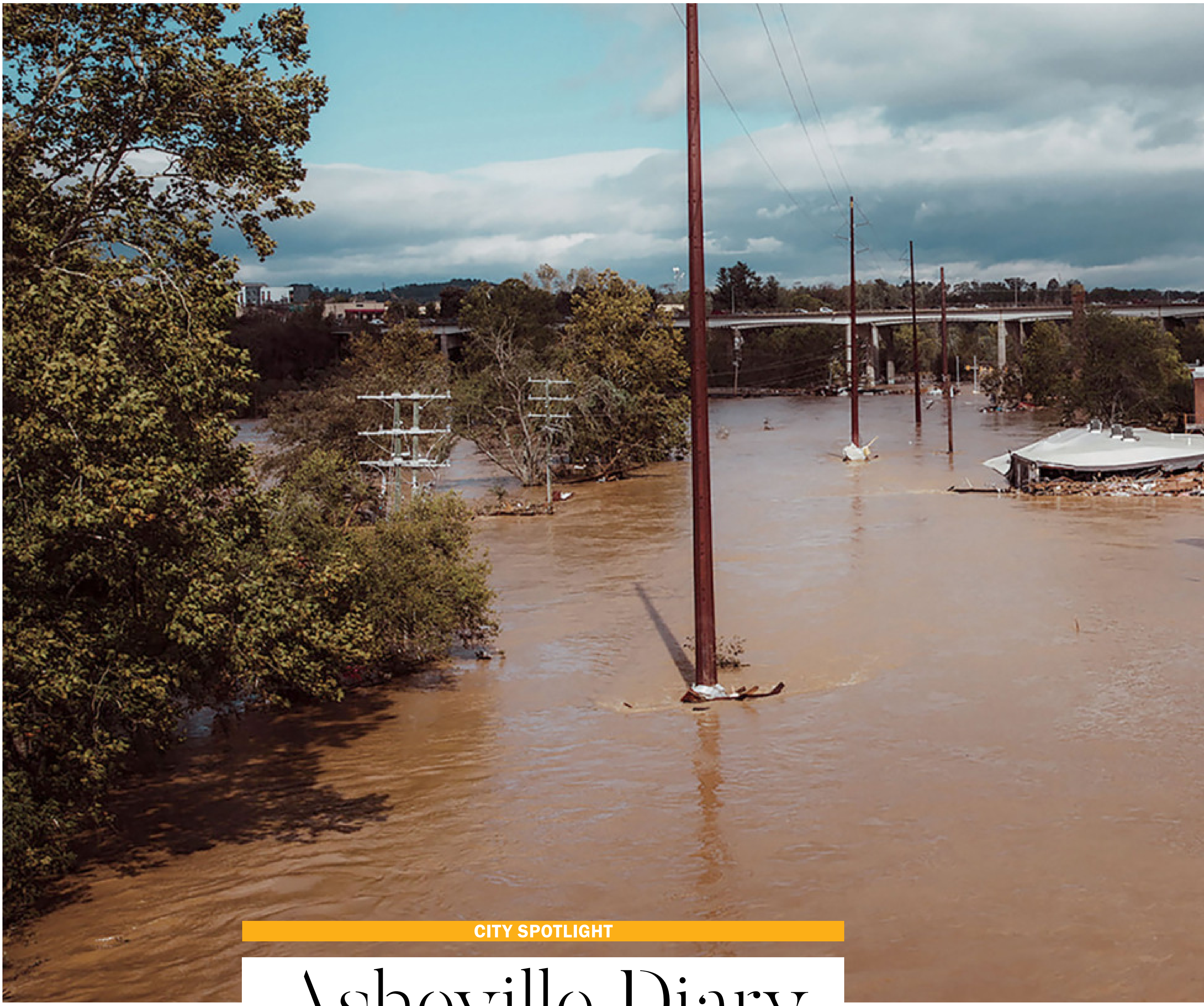


František Kupka: *Disks of Newton (Study for "Fugue in Two Colors")*, 1912; in "Harmony & Dissonance: Orphism in Paris, 1910–1930."



Nolan Oswald Dennis: *multipolar calibration model*, 2024.

Nahas: Courtesy ZKM—Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe; Flack: Courtesy Museum of Modern Art, New York/©Audrey Flack Marcus Estate; Kupka: Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art/©2024 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris; Dennis: Courtesy Nolan Oswald Dennis/Photo Anthea Pokroy



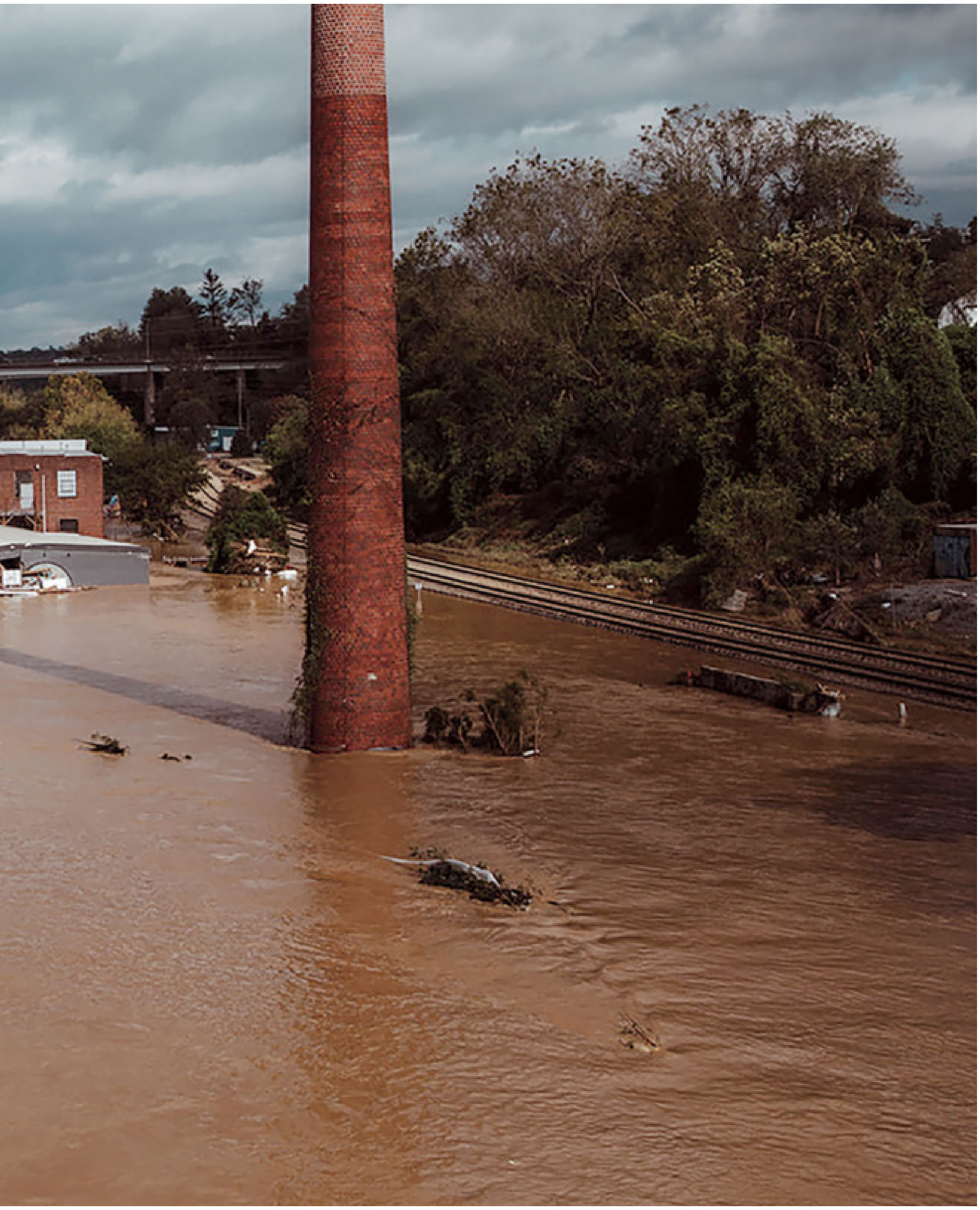
CITY SPOTLIGHT

Asheville Diary

In Asheville's River Arts District, some artists lost it all in Hurricane Helene. Then, they organized in her wake.

On Friday, September 27, 2024, torrential rainfall from Hurricane Helene caused the French Broad River in Asheville, North Carolina, to crest at 24.67 feet, the Swannanoa tributary at 26.1. All that water flowed outward from the banks and sloshed into surrounding neighborhoods, obliterating most everything in its path. Systems and infrastructure across the city were knocked out: power lines, cell towers, water distribution systems, and ATMs. While early fatality reports were low, it was apparent that the death toll would balloon in the coming days of no power, no water, no promise of returning to normal. Officials warned that downed trees and debris blocked countless narrow and winding mountain roads, isolating people in their homes. Routine travel, where possible, became arduous—though there was hardly anywhere to go.

Helene missed me in Winston-Salem, and for the first few hours of Friday morning, we



Asheville's River Arts District on Sept. 28, 2024, the day after Hurricane Helene struck.

Photo Eliza Bell Schweizbach

thought it had missed my partner, Basil, on Asheville's east side, as well. But as time went on, his texts became more sporadic, more urgent. Some were sent from Mission Hospital, where he'd go for a bottle or two of water (drinking water would not be restored until November 18, 53 days after the storm hit). He sent others from the sidewalk in front of a boutique downtown hotel that surprisingly still had working Wi-Fi, and with it, a connection to the outside world. I was brainstorming evacuation plans, but gas stations were closed for miles, and he had only a quarter of a tank left. We heard that all the interstates and major thoroughfares were closed, and soon, I'd see footage of a whole section of I-26 falling away, snapping off the side of the mountain like a block from a chocolate bar.

Growing up in upstate South Carolina and living in the far western part of North Carolina for the past few years – in a sliver of the state eerily spared Helene's wrath – these places were all familiar to me, either as the homes of friends and craftspeople, beloved spots for family vacations, or historically important areas that continue to foster robust, thriving communities. Seeing all the destruction was initially incomprehensible. Amid it all, my mind turned to artists. Age-old art and craft practices are woven into the fabric of western North Carolina's culture, and of the wider Appalachian region too. What would the storm chisel away from this core piece of regional identity?

By Sunday morning, a section of I-26 East had reopened, allowing Basil to take a roundabout route to reach me. As he was leaving Asheville, news of Helene's destruction was finally getting out through mainstream outlets. Aerial photographs and videos of the River Arts District – a neighborhood Helene's waters almost completely swallowed – proliferated on our social feeds. Images of a few roofs protruding from a sea of murky brown water sent our minds spinning, trying to predict what was safe and what would be left.

"It's so strange to be in the epicenter of a disaster and not know what's happening," Tracey Morgan, who has operated an eponymous gallery in Asheville since 2017, told me over the phone. "I could get a cell signal in a certain place, but I couldn't get any data. [My husband and I] didn't see any news. We had no idea of anything unless we saw it firsthand."

Fortunately, her gallery space suffered only minimal damage and was restored with a few days of mopping, airing out, and scraping up floor paint. But just across the parking lot, the water was two feet higher. And just two miles down the road, where one of Morgan's artists, painter Hannah Cole, has her studio, the story was completely different. Cole lost everything when the Swannanoa overflowed, ravaging and washing away much of Southside Studios. "My studio is on the river side of the building, so as the waters receded, it drained out *through* my studio, leaving a two-foot layer of mud, now layered in mold," she wrote on Instagram. "My entire flat file," she lamented, "every sketchbook, every experimental and unfinished piece, every drawing was inside."

Tucked into a commercial district between the now devastated Biltmore Village and the still standing Asheville Mall, which transformed into a hub for recovery efforts, Southside

Top, Tracey Morgan in front of her namesake gallery. Above, the inside of the gallery mid-cleanup.

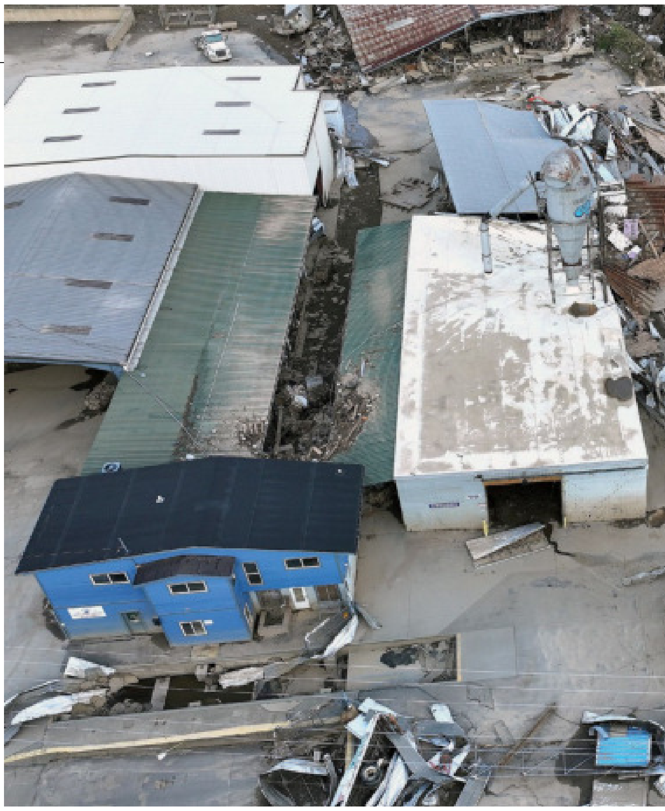
Studios is an 8,000-square-foot warehouse that started renting to artists in 2013. Neighbors include a propane supplier, a scrap metal dealer, an appliance repair shop, and a mix of repurposed and revitalized depots, including a punk-inspired antique mall, a 4-year-old brewery, and a CrossFit studio. It's an ideal area for resourceful creatives, as forgotten warehouse districts with lower rent often are. Being parallel to the Swannanoa River was a risk that artists like Cole and potter Melissa Weiss were willing to take.

"We've had flood scares before," Weiss told me, "but even when it flooded a good amount – like once, we rode a canoe down our street to get to the studio – water was still about five feet from getting into the building." Weiss produces her stoneware using clay that she digs from a plot of land she owns in the Ozarks of Northwest Arkansas, and her pieces are crafted without a pottery wheel. She lost supplies almost irreplaceable, and pieces time-intensive and one-of-a-kind.

By the time Weiss and I spoke a couple weeks later, she was taking stock of the damage and trying to figure out the best way forward. All the studio's electric kilns were gone. Her team saved two gas kilns, but one was filled with so much mud that "we couldn't open it." East Fork, the trailblazing Asheville-based ceramic dinnerware company cofounded and co-owned by Henri Matisse's great-grandson, offered to help Weiss move her kilns and store them temporarily. Help came in via GoFundMe donations, offers of teaching engagements, and emergency residency opportunities. Still, rebuilding will be a significant hurdle. "It's this catch-22," she told me. "We have to rebuild so we can make a living, but we can't rebuild the studio unless we can make a living."

Weiss coped by putting it all into perspective, remembering that "in this area, people have lost their entire homes, their lives, or even their loved ones." Still, "I know more artists who have lost their studios than not." And when overwhelmed, she realized it helps to "think about it in little pieces" or one step at a time. "People who grew up in Louisiana sent me letters and talked about how they lost everything [during Katrina] – they watched their elementary school wash away, things like that – and they wrote, 'you'll get through this. We did.'"

The River Arts District, a mile-long stretch of 26 studio buildings and material suppliers along the French Broad River, was home to more than 300 artists and supply warehouses in repurposed buildings that welcome thousands of visitors yearly. Gaining a reputation in the mid-1980s as a hub of cheap, spacious, industrial workspaces, River Arts has transformed into a multifaceted complex and fashionable tourist destination. Some of the buildings – and even former artist studios – have been converted into restaurants, bars, and a record store. To complement an artsy afternoon, the City of Asheville developed a sprawling greenway along the riverbank, with attractive landscaping, branded sculptures, and public restrooms to boot.



An aerial view of the River Arts District, showing the aftermath of the storm on Oct. 2, 2024.

Basil and I drove into the District a week after the flood. Most of the water had receded, and much of the neighborhood was reduced to rubble. We pulled up to Riverview Station, a tannery-turned-studio building that had survived the notorious hundred-year flood of 1916; it was structurally sound, but the insides

Artist Hannah Cole (left) and her mud-filled studio. Cole lost 20 years' worth of work to Hurricane Helene.

Morgan: Courtesy Tracey Morgan Gallery, Asheville (2); Cole: Photos Hannah Cole (3); River Arts District: Photo Mario Tama/Getty Images

were destroyed. Hunks of drywall and mud-splattered artwork were laid out across the parking lot to dry. One artist had lined their works up opposite the building, leaning on the guardrails parallel to the French Broad River. “These paintings have a water line from the second floor,” read a folded cardboard sign next to the works, advertising them for sale at half price. “They will clean up easily with foaming cleanser on the surface.”

I couldn’t fault their entrepreneurial endeavor. Gawking has been a defining feature of western North Carolina tourism, especially from September to November. In the autumn months, we call them “leaf peepers,” folks coming from across the country to see the changing, fiery-colored foliage from the comfort of the passenger seat. Peeping happens primarily on the Blue Ridge Parkway, a New Deal–era, car-centric effort initially billed as the Appalachian Scenic Highway, with plenty of turnouts to admire how red, orange, and yellow treetops fade into hazy blue and violet peaks.

This fall, leaf peeping turned into disaster peeping. As the afternoon wore on, more and more cars descended on the River Arts District, driving slowly and rubbernecking along Lyman Street, the neighborhood’s main thoroughfare. Even in tragedy, River Arts was made into a spectacle, an attraction. It was easy to understand how a survivalist impulse to capitalize followed.

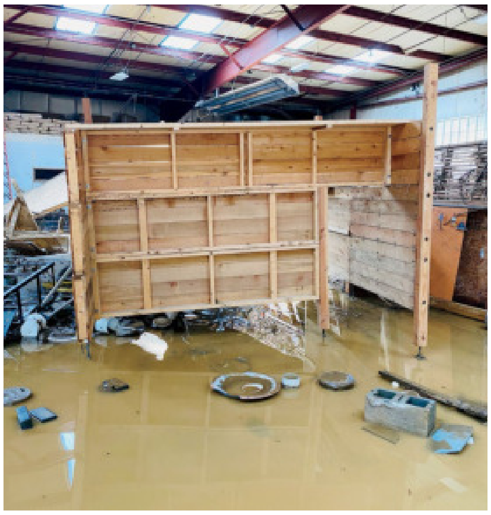
On the studio side, volunteers, who had to sign a liability waiver from the landlord and often bring their own PPE, shoveled out sludge in the hope of clearing out the building before mold set in. If meteorologists’ numbers and viral videos were hard to believe, the exterior walls of Riverview offered physical proof: darkened bricks up to the lower third of the second floor led to a wavy line, showing how high the waters had risen.

About 24 miles north of Asheville, along the banks of the French Broad River, sits downtown Marshall—a two-lane Main Street that’s idyllic on most days, but that resembled a war zone when we visited more than two weeks after the storm. To streamline recovery efforts, the town had effectively closed the central road; Basil and I had to park at the supersize grocery store off the highway and ride with a local volunteer to Nanostead, a sustainable tiny home builder that has become a de facto mutual aid hub. From there, we moved from tent to tent—signing in, suiting up with donated PPE, hopping into the bed of a flatbed truck—before reaching downtown to meet potter Alexandra Barao.

Cleanup was still the top priority. Almost everyone wore hazmat suits, snug respirators, and, sometimes, army gear as they pressure washed the mud from buildings, cleared out ruined storefronts, and distributed supplies. As a tanker truck rumbled by spraying water on the road, Barao explained, “they’ve been wetting the streets to try to keep the dust down,” a reminder of the unknown toxins likely among the debris.

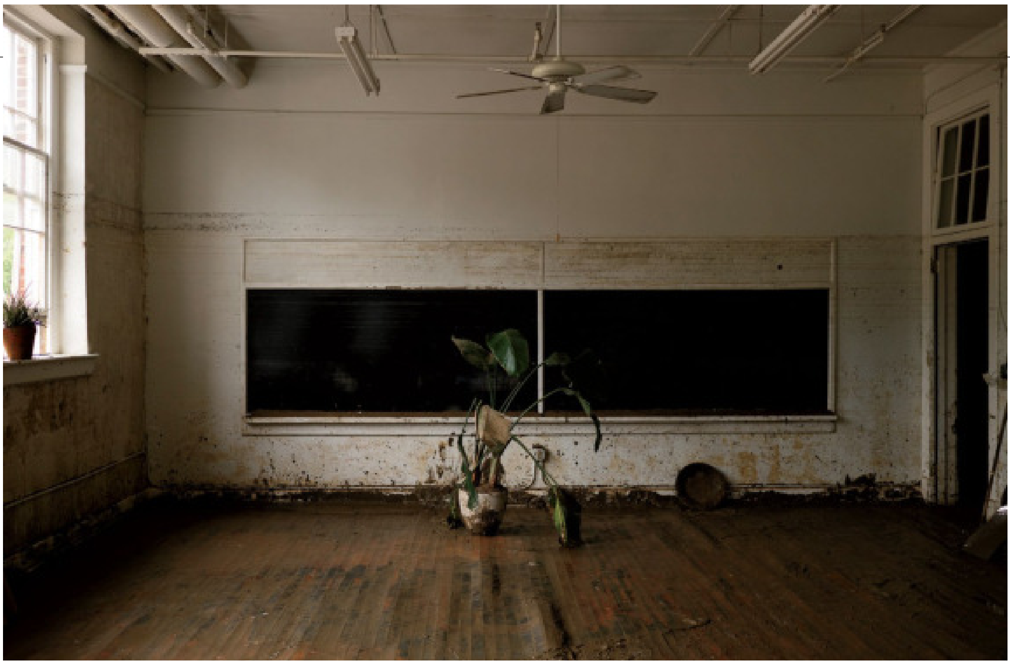
The three of us crossed the half-mile bridge from downtown to Blannahassett Island, where the old Marshall High School now houses more than two dozen artist studios and an event space. We met Frank Lombardo, a painter who has had a studio at Marshall High for 15 years and is now leading the cleanup effort. He described having to climb through a window to get into the building, since the door locks had been jammed with mud. By the time we visited, the muck was gone, but the floorboards were warped and white shelves were stained brown. In the event space, bundles of starch-white paper lanterns, untouched by the rising waters, hung from the high ceiling, swaying slightly in the breeze from the open windows.

Lombardo expressed gratitude for the help from volunteers and the United States Army, but admitted that all the attention was overwhelming. “I’m an introverted painter,” he said, his voice hoarse from having shouted over power washers for days on end. “Now, I’m managing 50 soldiers and 40 volunteers. I don’t know how to do this.” He credited friends and other area artists for helping him manage this enormous undertaking, a reminder that rallying support and community devotion is another effect of catastrophes like Helene, one



Potter Melissa Weiss’s ceramics studio. Top, her dog Isla before the storm; center, Weiss standing in her flooded kiln; and bottom, the studio post-Helene.

Courtesy Melissa Weiss (3)



The water line just above the chalkboard inside Marshall High Studios on Oct. 4, 2024.

Top, Army personnel working alongside civilians to clean up Marshall High Studios. Above, volunteer Jared Rigney pauses for a portrait.

too often overlooked.

"Disaster, along with other moments of social upheaval," wrote Rebecca Solnit in *A Paradise Built in Hell* (2009), "is when the shackles of conventional belief and role fall away and the possibilities open up." In recent years, it seems that artists' roles are constantly evolving, expanding beyond their traditional boundaries owing to economic insecurity and the devaluation of creative labor, a notion that social practice works and other interventions have played with to mixed results. Here, in the storm's aftermath, artists inadvertently took on roles as emergency managers, authority figures, mutual aid organizers, town spokespeople, and agents of recovery. It was daunting, but also inspiring to witness a community, however momentarily, value artists as leaders. The determination that was driving rebuilding ignited creativity, joy, ingenuity, and a communal spirit. Temporarily, we set aside tourism, big business, and other capitalist drives that have fueled regional growth for decades.

Josh Copus, a Marshall-based potter, shared this feeling: "I'm fully committed at this point," he told me as we drove to deliver tools to a friend. Our freewheeling conversation focused on Marshall's great progress, but also the uncertainty that loomed—especially for Copus, who also owns several businesses in town.

On the Saturday after the storm, he'd found himself asking, "do we have a town here anymore? Before we could get down in here, when you're just seeing the flooding, it felt like there's no way we can come back from this." Then, folks started showing up: cleaning, salvaging, coming together to help one another physically and emotionally. For Josh, it was energizing, a glimmer of hope for a place that felt, in the early hours, condemned. Copus owns the downtown Old Marshall Jail Hotel and Zadie's Market, along with Clayspace Co-op in Asheville's River Arts District; the market and hotel had been ravaged. Even still, he said, "this town was never the buildings. It's always the people who make the place. And we've got the best people." ●

—*Robert Alan Grand*

Ceramicist Josh Copus (center) and others outside the Madison County Courthouse in downtown Marshall.

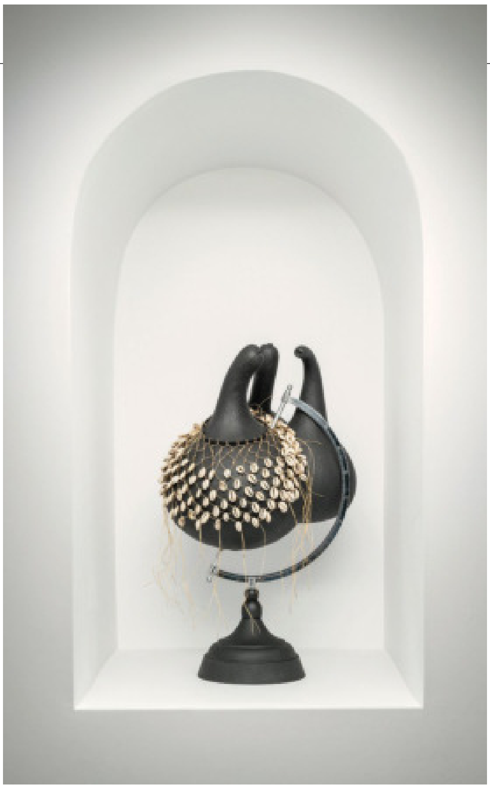
Photos Jack Sorokin (4)

CAPE TOWN

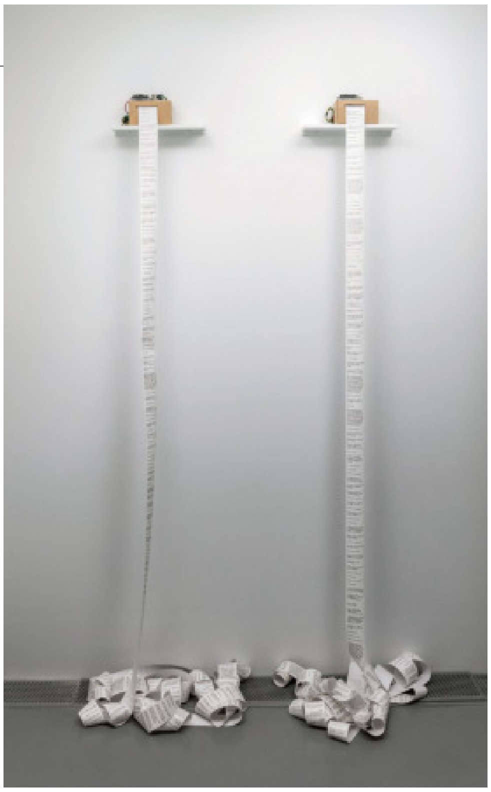
Nolan Oswald Dennis

Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa
Through May 25

Sculptures and installations explore the pleasures and limits of knowledge, and the trouble with authority.



Nolan Oswald Dennis: *model for OSPAAAL*, 2024.



Biko.Fanon, 2018.

From left: Courtesy Nolan Oswald Dennis/Photo Anthea Pokroy; Courtesy Liza Essers Collection and Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, Cape Town, and London

"Understudies," a survey of work by Zambian-born, Johannesburg-based artist Nolan Oswald Dennis at the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (MOCAA), opens with an overture – or so I thought. I entered through a reading room containing an imposing vertical steel structure, a wall drawing rendered in graphite, and the artist's studio notes: research drawings that would become their new body of work. The room was an example of what Dennis described in the exhibition text as "quietly sharing secret strategies of liberation through convoluted and non-linear forms."

I later found out that this room was actually the end of the exhibition: I had seen the show in reverse. This false beginning nevertheless set the tone for me and felt fitting for an exhibition set on challenging and reimagining knowledge and structures that feel fixed, whether astronomy, land sovereignty, geological formations, or cartographic systems.

Dennis relinquishes some authorship (read: power) in the making of some works in "Understudies," calling on museum workers at the Zeitz MOCAA to cocreate. The work *Xenolith (Letsema)*, 2024, a large column made from lines of packed soil, is installed alongside the exposed hundred-year-old columns of the grain silo where the museum is built. *Letsema*, a Setswana word, speaks to the practice of voluntarily working together – a communal act typically applied to farming but extended to ways of organizing that took root during liberation struggles in Southern African countries. This collaborative work considers what images can emerge when labor is done collectively, and becomes a way to disorganize space and time – *space*, by reimagining the very structure of the museum, and *time*: the time of labor, and of geological deep time.

Space, time, and the mystifying yet ordinary ways they interact are recurring themes for Dennis, whose concurrent show, "overturns," is on view at the Swiss Institute in New York through April. The most affecting work in "Understudies" is titled *Superposition*, 2024, after a principle of quantum mechanics: It describes how a physical system can be in more than one state at a time. This immersive sonic room-size installation, boasting an infrasonic sound system consisting of a sub-bass speaker, LED unit, and sensors, is a techno-poetic reflection on our relationship to land, deep time, and planetary interconnection. The work uses acoustic compositions of seismic data documenting the earth's vibrations collected by the Wits School of Geosciences in Johannesburg during the 2020 Covid lockdown. These sounds capture data about volcanoes, bombs, and earthquakes, but are played at frequencies beyond the threshold perceptible by the human ear. *Superposition* explores how we might learn to listen to the earth, attuning ourselves to the vibrations that pass through it; it also points to the limits of what we can know and perceive, and to the limits of data's authority.

Indeed, the show often speaks corporeally as much as it does cognitively. Throughout the show, Fred Moten and Wu Tsang's concept of gravitational feel rang loud in my mind. I kept thinking – nay, sensing – a kind of gravitational pull toward space and time, my body *feeling* its own mass, aware of its weight and the weight of time. Though maps, machines, data, and drawings fill the museum, they are arranged in installations that choreograph bodies. For instance, *Izintaba ~~(Hottentots-Holland)~~*, 2024, is a 12-minute immersive film featuring digital simulations of mountains, hills, and other elevations. Viewing the film, one is enveloped by it; the rocks seem to float toward you.

In *Biko.Fanon* (2018), receipt printers attached to a wall emit an imagined conversation between two radical Black thinkers, Steve Bantu Biko and Frantz Fanon, around the notion of love; Dennis used an algorithm to re-create a dialogue based on their specific writings. This simple yet powerful gesture speaks to how we might imagine radical Black liberation – as being necessarily founded on the ability to hold each other, where holding implies a *love ethic* in the manner described by bell hooks: a kind of radical love encompassing care, devotion, passion, longing, and tenderness, as well as tough love rooted in responsibility and action. Another work in the series imagines an exchange between Biko and Nomzamo Winnie Mandela. These speculative conversations are gestures toward centering radical love within the context of decoloniality, and toward imagining the possibilities of political solidarity grounded in care.

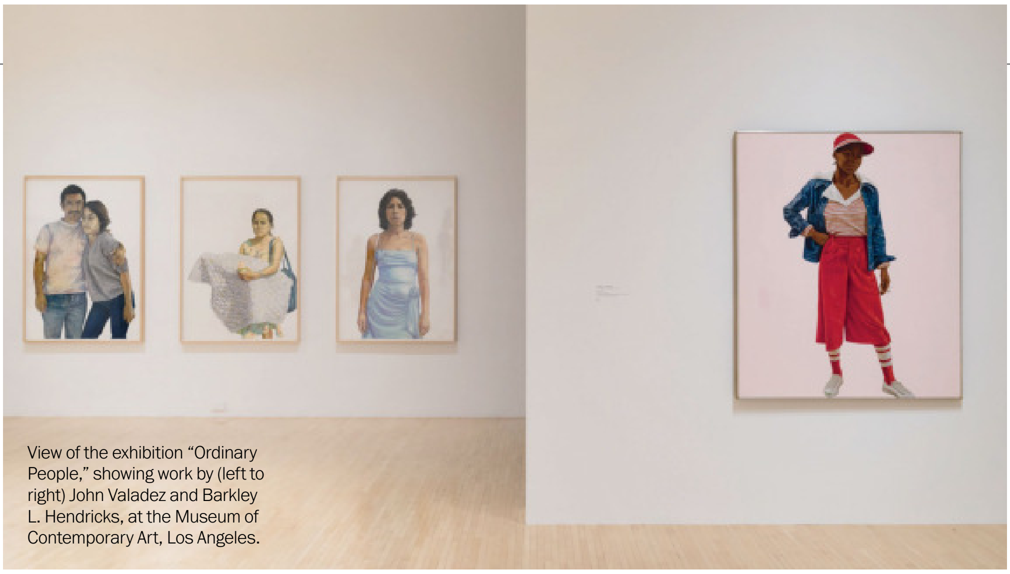
Care as resistance recurs in works like the pliable sculpture *Soft Rock (leNqaba yo Mkhosi)*, custom seating featuring a photograph of a rock found by Dennis's interlocutor, the artist Vusumzi Nkomo. The yielding texture of the seating contrasts with the unyielding nature of the actual rock – a symbol of dispossession and resistance – what Dennis refers to as a "gesture for those who remember what the stone can do.” The stone, used as a weapon by millions of Black South Africans against authority and bullets, also poetically symbolizes the strength of countless women whose struggles remain unheard, *referencing* the isiZulu idiom: *Wathint’ abafazi, wathint’ imbokodo (You strike a woman, you strike a rock.)* This work speaks to the persistent tensions between pliability and rigidity when it comes to acts of resistance and care.

“Understudies” foregrounds Dennis’s impulse to work against the existing logic of knowledge production and worldmaking. I can’t help but think of Dennis’s work through the lens of world-ending praxis, as propositions for ending this world and creating new ones informed by Audre Lorde’s mantra that “the master’s tools cannot dismantle the master’s house.” The work does not provide clear answers to the problem of what to do when systems of knowledge are polluted by entanglements with power, but it does offer ways of experimenting with liberation.

A question that lingers in my mind is whether Dennis, in crafting elegant works so deeply rooted in his own conceptual language, risks veering into ultra-abstraction. Do the smooth lines, undulations, and symmetries found in most of the works risk diluting the weight of those injustices embedded in the systems he critiques, rendering them palatable and detached? Or is it that, as his work dreams of liberation and envisions different, better worlds, the question becomes whether such visions offer genuine avenues for escape – or whether they, and art itself, risk being merely escapist. ●

– Nkgopoleng Moloi

View of Dennis’s exhibition “Understudies,” 2024, at Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town.



View of the exhibition “Ordinary People,” showing work by (left to right) John Valadez and Barkley L. Hendricks, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

LOS ANGELES

“Ordinary People: Photorealism and the Work of Art since 1968”

Museum of Contemporary Art
Through May 4

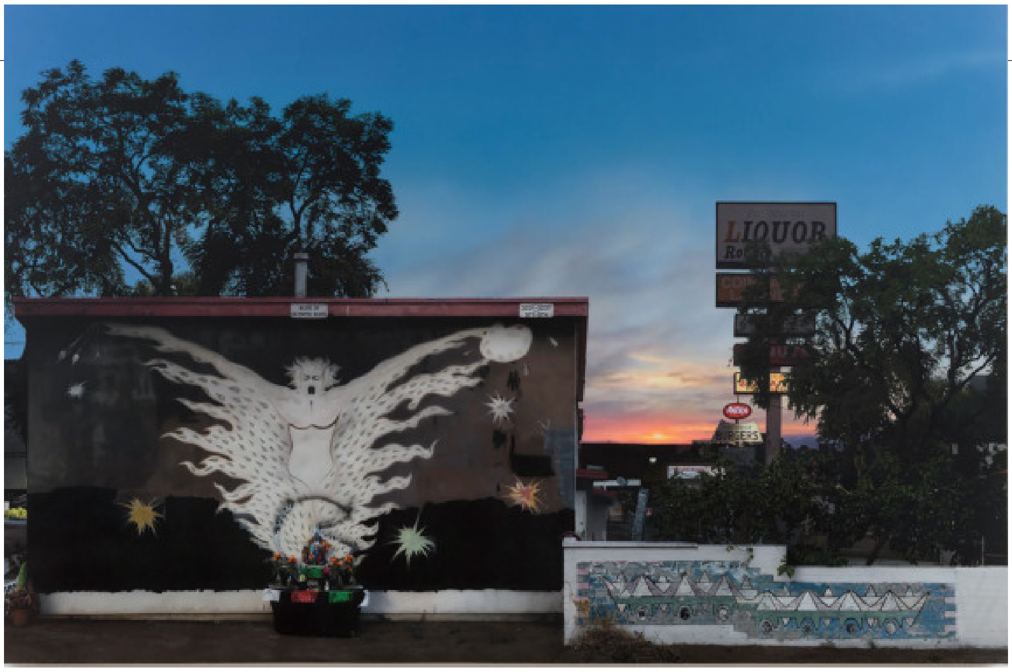
A cast-off movement gets a 21st-century update.

A trio of portraits captures the denizens of 1980s Los Angeles going about their daily lives. In one, a lithe taxi dancer in a blue dress offers a glance equal parts sultry and weary. In another, a woman stops for a moment as she balances a blanketed infant and an ice cream cone. In a third, a man wraps his arm awkwardly around a woman, in a pose that suggests they’d hurried together for the snapshot. “Ordinary People: Photorealism and the Work of Art since 1968” opens with these three 1983–84 works by LA-based painter John Valadez. Since the mid-1970s, Valadez has used photographs as source material for his canvases. And, in them, you see as the camera sees: snapshots of bodies frozen in time, in informal poses that defy the ceremonious nature of painted portraiture. The conventions of photorealism have long guided the artist’s work, but by opening with Valadez, “Ordinary People” signals right off that this is not your average photorealism show.

This Pop-adjacent impulse, which got its start in the 1960s, has for decades rested on a definition established by New York gallerist and author Louis K. Meisel, whose 1980 *Photorealism* became the movement’s defining book. Photorealism, he wrote, included not only painters whose renderings were as realistic and detailed as photographs, but those who employed photography as a tool and emulated the aesthetics of the camera in their work. Listed in the text were 13 key artists, many of them now well-known, such as Chuck Close, Robert Bechtle, and Richard Estes. All 13 were white, and only one was a woman: Audrey Flack, a painter known for boldly saturated depictions of cluttered dressing tables marrying the drama of Dutch vanitas painting with the glare of the camera’s flash. Meisel’s list centered work that riffed on US consumer culture – cluttered storefronts, chromed-out midcentury diners, and whale-size automobiles – and it became the template for other exhibitions that followed. When the now shuttered Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin presented “Picturing America: Photorealism in the 1970s” in 2009, it featured the 13 artists Meisel named, with minimal additions.

MOCA’s exhibition expands the frame. Curator Anna Katz included some of the movement’s standard-bearers: Bechtle, Estes, Flack. But she featured numerous works by women and people of color, along with

From top: Photo Jeff McLane/Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Photo Dillon Marsh/Courtesy Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town



Sayre Gomez: *2 Spirits*, 2024.

artists who have expanded the photorealist impulse, employing it to new ends. Valadez, for example, who is Chicano, depicts quotidian aspects of Mexican American life as a way of countering stereotypes. "The idea was to basically dare people to look at a class of people – highly rendered," he tells the curators in the catalog. "I was finally developing a technique through my drawing from photography that … was no cartoon style. There was no stylization. You're basically looking at real people."

Instead of offering a comprehensive historical exhibition, "Ordinary People" is structured around loose themes that reflect the distinct ways in which photorealism has been employed. An early gallery, for example, presents works from different eras inspired by personal snapshots, featuring paintings of family gatherings and other intimate moments. *Déjà Vu*, a poignant 1986 canvas by San Francisco painter Lenore Chinn, is a tribute to her friend Tommy Bridges, who died of AIDS-related complications in 1984. It depicts Chinn, looking stylish in a fedora and fur jacket, along with another friend, G. David Murphy, reflected in a mirror in Bridges's apartment. Murphy's face is hidden behind the camera whose flash illuminates specks of dust that hang in the air. They have come to pack up their friend's belongings in the wake of his death. It's a mournful view of queer community coming together at the height of the AIDS crisis. And though it is rendered realistically, it's also imbued with painterly touches: the flash emits spattered paint instead of light; the images of dancers that hang on the wall are composed of loose brushstrokes.

The show also explores themes like portraiture, politics, and protest. The result is absorbingly eclectic. In one gallery, you'll see Barkley L. Hendricks's magnetic *Sir Charles, Alias Willie Harris* (1972), showing three different views of a dapper Black man with an Afro wearing a red trench coat. In another, you'll find the engrossing *Twenty-Six Seconds*, a 2024 installation by Cynthia Daignault that painstakingly re-creates the Zapruder footage of John F. Kennedy's 1963 assassination frame by frame on 486 individual 8-by-10-inch canvases, allowing the viewer to dwell on every split second of that historic moment. Elsewhere, in a room devoted to urban themes, the millennial artist Alfonso Gonzalez Jr. re-creates the facade of a pawn shop in *American Pawn Shop* (2024), complete with graffiti, job flyers, and fictional band posters for real performers such as Drakeo the Ruler and Chino Pacas. Where the original photorealists reflected on the gloss of consumerism, Gonzalez depicts its bleak endpoint.

The eclecticism, however, results in some mystifying inclusions. Martin Wong's paintings of brick walls nod at realism, but how they fit into a show of paintings inspired by photography goes unexplained. The same goes for a series of sculptures by Marilyn Levine, a Canadian artist known for creating trompe l'oeil ceramics inspired by articles of clothing. But this is a minor gripe. Collectively, the diverse range of works in "Ordinary People" tells an intriguing story about the way our existence is increasingly mediated by the camera. Color palettes emulate the yellowing fade of old photographs and the overly saturated or unnaturally cool tones of digital imagery, a reminder that the camera is rarely an objective observer. In some, a picture's photographer makes a ghostly appearance on a reflective surface, making visible the artist's gaze.

Recent works show how artists continue to update the photorealist approach. Sayre Gomez's *2 Spirits* (2024), for example, features the sun setting behind a mural of a spectral figure that seems inspired by William Blake. Gomez's painting is based on an actual mural located in Boyle Heights, but the background – a strip mall bearing a towering liquor store sign – has been added as backdrop from another location. Some original photorealists likewise tweaked reality in their canvases, but an artist working in the style today uses photographs made increasingly malleable by software like Photoshop. In the past, many critics dubbed photorealism gauche and consigned the movement to painting's past. But as "Ordinary People" deftly shows, its themes couldn't be more contemporary. ●

– Carolina A. Miranda

View of the exhibiiton "Ordinary People," showing work by Martin Wong (left) and Barkley L. Hendricks (center).

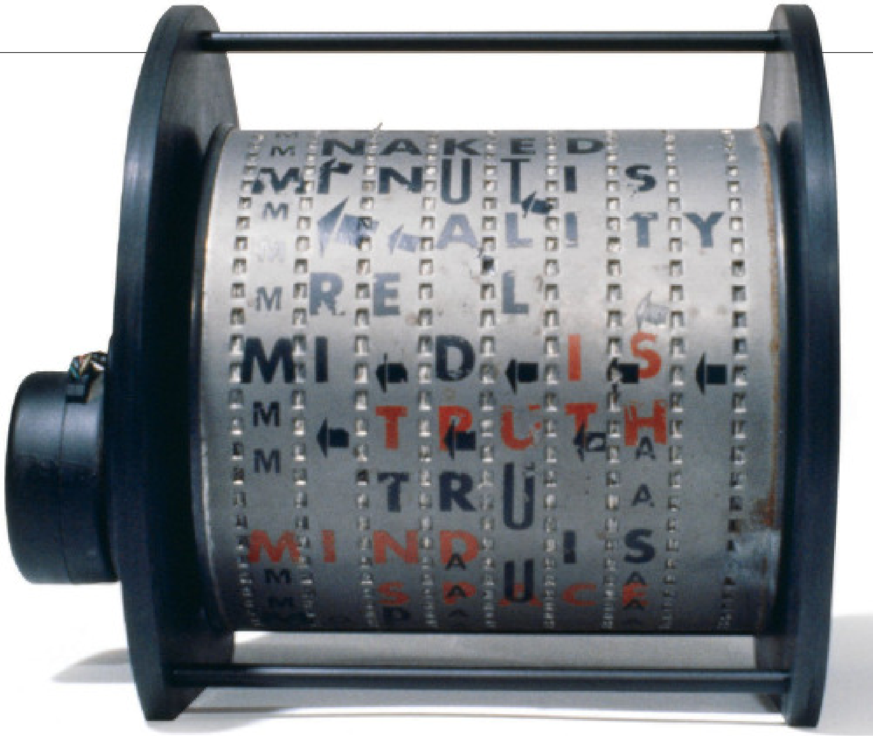
From top: Courtesy François Ghebaly Gallery, Xavier Hufkens, and Galerie Nagel Draxler/Photo Jeff McLane; Photo Jeff McLane/Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

LUXEMBOURG

“Radical Software: Women, Art & Computing 1960–1991”

MUDAM
Through February 2
Next Stop: Kunsthalle Vienna

An exhibition on trailblazing women in computing lumps together girlbosses in ballistics and utopian hackers.



Liliane Lijn: *Man Is Naked*, 1965.

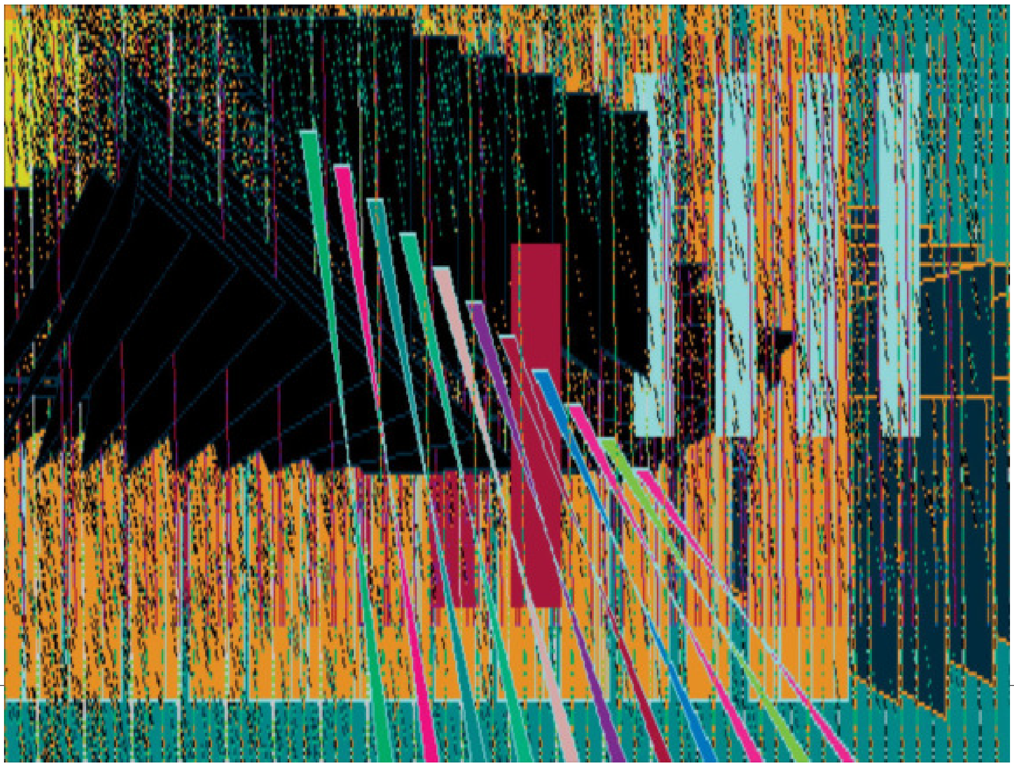
Until the 1960s, the word *computer* indicated a worker – often a woman – who entered calculations into a mainframe. A new exhibition, “Radical Software: Women, Art & Computing 1960–1991,” unearths the history of this gendered workforce, while also highlighting those women artists experimenting with or “musing” those same machines. Taking a broad view of the computer in art history, it includes artists who used the computer as tool and as subject, as well as those who simply “worked in a computational way.”

The exhibition is divided into five thematic sections, organized roughly chronologically. “Zeros and Ones” shows early experiments in computing, mostly in the form of wall-based works, but it also includes Liliane Lijn’s kinetic sculpture *Man Is Naked* (1965), a fragile work from her “Poem Machines” (1962–68) series rarely seen in operation. In the “Hardware” section, paintings by Ulla Wiggen and Deborah Remington evoke the mysteries of various technologies hidden behind their shiny exteriors, while “Software” returns to weaving as the origins of the “soft wares” that have come to define computational output. “Home Computing” traces the availability of the computer to artists who were making screen-based works via novel programs. And finally, “I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess,” which takes its name from Donna Haraway’s 1985 “Cyborg Manifesto,” explores the repercussions of the computer on the (female) body, via the likes of Valie Export’s photomontages and Analívia Cordeiro’s algorithmic choreographies.

The show is organized around a technology rather than a genre, movement, or medium, which makes for unexpected and captivating inclusions. A computational rendering of Isa Genzken’s *Ellipsoid* (1977), for instance, is displayed alongside the sculptural object that it produced. The pairing underscored her ambition to make sculptures she called “mathematically correct.” Elsewhere, *The House of Dust* (1967), a computer-generated poem by Fluxus artist Alison Knowles, is displayed on a vintage printer, alongside Katalin Ladik’s *Genesis 01-11* (1975), comprising enchanting sonic interpretations of various circuit boards rapidly obsoleting.

Some of these early experiments betray an uncertainty about the status of “artwork.” Beryl Korot – cofounder of the magazine *Radical Software*, from which this exhibition takes its title – displays *Text and Commentary* (1976–77) as sketches, woven textiles, and videos, alongside documentation of the process. It is unclear

Samia Halaby: *Bird Dog 6*, 1987.



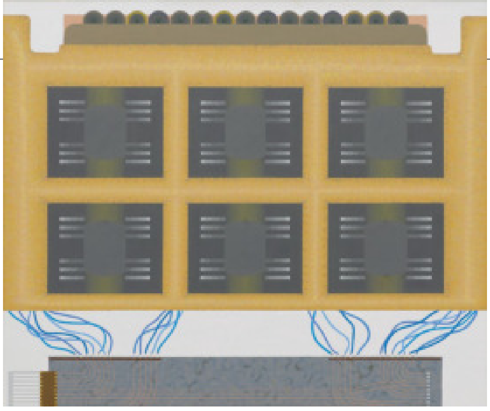
From top: Courtesy Liliane Lijn/Photo Stephen Weiss; Courtesy Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut and Hamburg

where the art object ends and the idea begins, a move in line with the conceptual art movement of the time.

The exhibition positions the advent of computing as a process that eradicates any separation between fine art and craft. This rupture is welcome, as women have historically been excluded from the former category. This argument is most clearly articulated in the links the exhibition makes between computing and weaving: digital artist Charlotte Johannesson, whose work is shown as woven fabrics, digital drawings, and digital images displayed on impressive LCD screens in the sculpture garden, asserts that the screen's pixels correspond to the warps and wefts of the loom.

But the exhibition here misses an opportunity to thread a more expansive history of the relationships between weaving and computing, overlooking Indigenous women's efforts in particular. There are no Indigenous weavers, nor does the exhibition feature any reference to the weaver women who produced Intel microchips on the Navajo rewservation, a story that has been recounted in the art world at least since the inclusion of Marilou Schultz at Documenta 14 in 2017.

Computing is infrastructurally intensive, and "Radical Software" traces how artists took up computing in ways defined by the limited access to these technologies. The show lays claim to a global perspective that it ultimately doesn't flush out: there are more artists named Barbara here than artists based in the Global South.



Ulla Wiggen: *Infinitely Variable*, 1968.

A timeline included in the exhibition catalog and the booklet tracks women's contributions to computer history. It spans the first use of the term "computer" in 1613 to the public availability of the internet in 1991. It merges hallmark moments by figures such as Ada Lovelace, the NACA computers, the ENIAC six, and Grace Hopper with the history of women artists concerned with the digital realm. In doing this, the exhibition aligns its artists with women working for the military-industrial complex: ENIAC, the world's first modern computer, was invented to compute ballistic missile trajectories (six young women programmed it), and Grace Hopper was a Navy officer. No computer program initiated by the United States government during the Cold War can be separated from its military efforts.

The exhibition revitalizes women who developed lethal tech, and whose stories deserve a dose of scrutiny, alongside those who expended great effort to experiment toward a more equal world. The question is whether this shared narrative serves these artists, whose experiments with the machines are described in the exhibition materials as comprising "the history of misuse." There is no need to girlboss ballistics.

The exhibition realizes its fullest potential when it showcases artists' experimental brushes with a new toolbox. Barbara T. Smith's *Outside Chance* (1975) uses 3,000 computer-generated "snowflakes" that she threw out a Las Vegas hotel room window to combine the best of programming with conceptual performance. Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's work on Ada Lovelace, expressed in the computer language ADA, proves a heartfelt biography in code. Samia Halaby's kinetic paintings and soundscapes, for which she learned BASIC and C coding languages, are a real addition to the field of abstract painting.

"Radical Software" makes for compelling new art historical readings through the means of computational technology. But as we are grappling with the impact of 20th-century technological developments in every realm, be it social, artistic, or military, inserting artists alongside engineers working toward military ends is a betrayal to the utopian thinking so ubiquitously felt in the show's best pieces. "Radical Software" shows that much remains to be done to properly recognize the women who were computers' developing workforce, problematic pioneers, and experimental misusers. ●

—Lua Vollaard

Katalin Ladik: *Genesis 01-11*, 1975.

From top: T&C Collection/Courtesy Galerie Buchholz; Courtesy acb Gallery of Contemporary Art, Budapest/Photo Marion Dessard

NEW YORK

“Harmony & Dissonance: Orphism in Paris, 1910–1930”

Guggenheim Museum
November 8, 2024–March 9, 2025

A survey of an amorphous development moves in and out of focus in search of pure form.

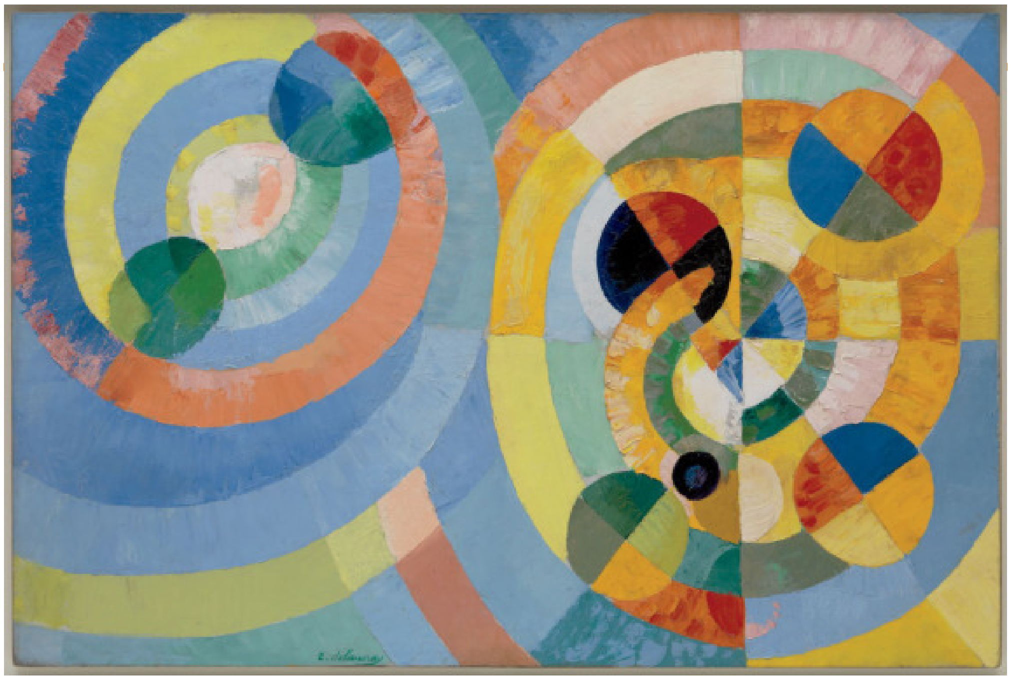
HARMONY &
DISSONANCE
Orphism in Paris, 1910–1930

In the pantheon of the early 20th-century avant-garde, Orphism – the subject of a sweeping but diffuse survey at the Guggenheim Museum – is rare among isms in that it remains relatively understudied and misapprehended, at least in comparison to modernist cognates like Futurism, Vorticism, and Cubism. The Cubists’ kaleidoscopic unmooring of geometry from perspectival propriety inspired Orphism’s drive toward “pure painting” – pictorial form and color liberated from figurative duties – but, confusingly enough, the movement’s name is bound up with literary allusion. Coined in 1912 by French poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire, it evokes Orpheus, the mythical Greek prophet and musician. For Apollinaire, music suggested a new model for modern painting distilled to its purest potential state, unbeholden to narrative exposition.

Though developed almost exclusively in Paris, Orphism involved artists of wide-ranging extraction and nationality, and the Orphic painters’ concern for “pure” form and color resonated with other developments in nonobjective painting from Germany to Italy to the United States. “Harmony & Dissonance: Orphism in Paris, 1910–1930” goes a long way in contextualizing some of those parallels and intersections. Enlivened by an impressive array of loans, the exhibition sets into relief Orphism’s specific aesthetic achievements as well as its amorphous taxonomy.

As the wall text notes, the painters most closely affiliated with Orphism – Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Francis Picabia, and František Kupka – never adapted Apollinaire’s term of designation as their own. They produced no manifesto or writing in its name, and the Delaunays, for their part, used the term “simultanism” to describe their work. But formal ambitions and optical effects undeniably united a few artists of disparate origins and diverging aesthetic trajectories, even if briefly.

A gallery tucked within the first curl of the Guggenheim’s ramp sets four core artists’ interrelated efforts into incandescent relief via one large-scale canvas each, produced in their most respectively “orphic” guise. Though the residues of representation persist in some of the paintings – the pulsing heavenly bodies of Robert Delaunay’s *Simultaneous Contrasts:*



Robert Delaunay: *Circular Forms*, 1930.

From top: Photo David Heald/© Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York; Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Installation view of "Harmony & Dissonance," 2024–25, at the Guggenheim Museum.

increasingly cinematic, commercial, and mechanized sights and sounds.

Sonia Delaunay's *Electric Prisms* (1913), with its titular nod to advances in electricity still relatively new at the time, underscores the decidedly urban tenor of Orphic painting in this regard. Poets like Apollinaire and the Futurists incorporated similar phenomena into their writing, both thematically and typographically, and Sonia collaborated in the same vein with Blaise Cendrars, another modernist poet resident in Paris at the time. Punctuated by a stylized Eiffel Tower, her luminous watercolor abstractions unfurl alongside (and bleed into) verse by Cendrars, whose "Prose of the Trans-Siberian and of Little Jehanne of France" – hanging in a vertical display in one of the Guggenheim's small bays – explores transcontinental train travel during the first Russian Revolution, in 1905.

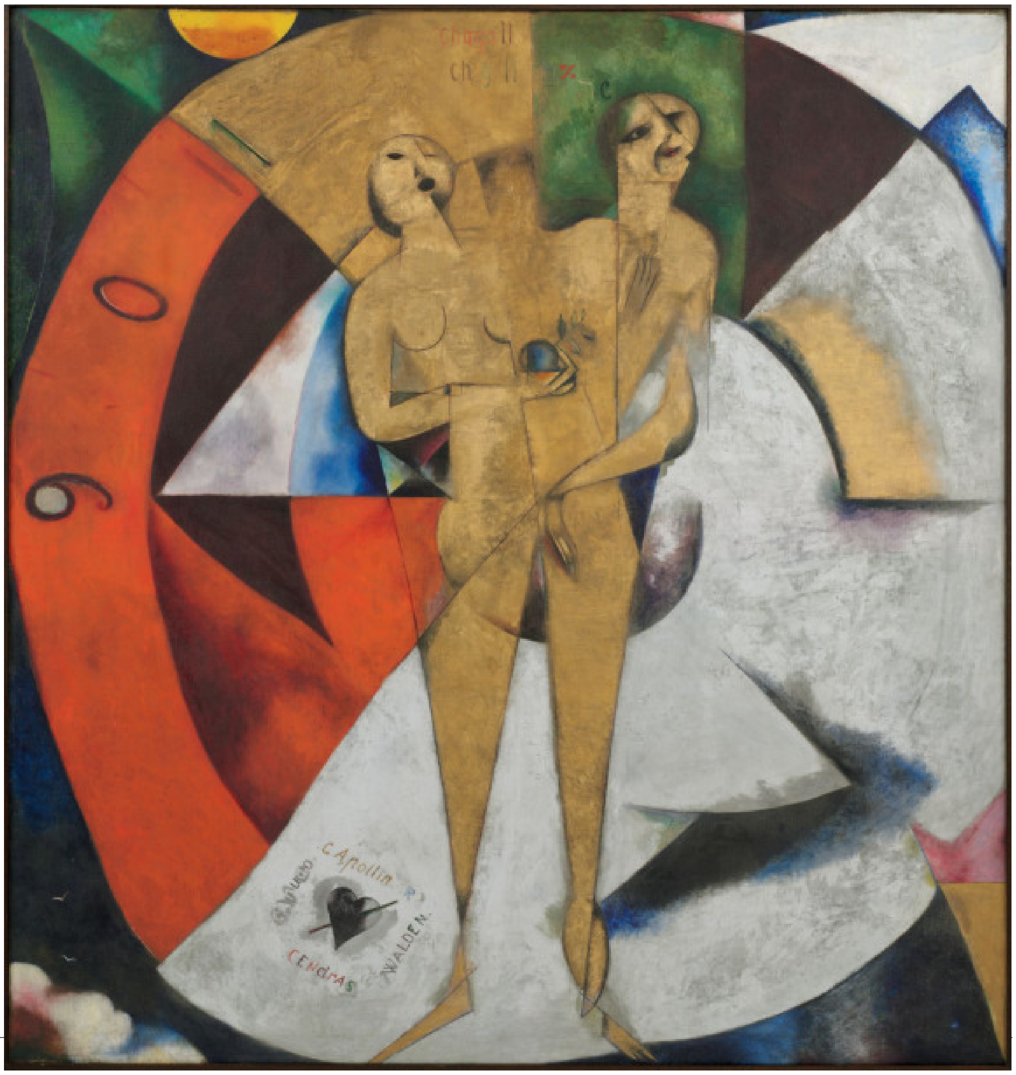
The Eiffel Tower recurs as a sign of urban life in various paintings by Robert Delaunay, where it becomes increasingly dematerialized. Even at its most abstract, his imagery refuses to give up the ghost of figuration. And the exhibition highlights with great flair his work's contiguity to that of other contemporaries. The corpulent clouds in Delaunay's *Tour Rouge* (1911–12), for instance, bear no closer equivalents than those painted by Fernand Léger during the same years, visible across the Guggenheim's atrium in a rendering of Parisian rooftops. The outsize prismatic clock that frames the figures in Marc Chagall's *Homage to Apollinaire* (1913) likewise rhymes unmistakably with the Delaunays' disks from the same period, just as Chagall's depictions of the Eiffel Tower and Parisian windows resonate with Robert Delaunay's series on the same motifs.

The show's attention to personal and professional collaborations is enlightening. The Delaunays' influence on the painters Eduardo Viana and Amadeo de Souza-Cardoso – and the echo of Portuguese "local color" on their *Sun and Moon* (1913), for example, or the currents rippling from the center of Kupka's *Localization of Graphic Motifs* (1912–13) – their imagery is chiefly concerned with rhythm and texture. Empirical reality does not dictate the hallucinatory swirl of color or gyration of form in works that appear derived instead from celestial inspiration or interior visions.

Just around the corner, Wassily Kandinsky's *Improvisation 28* (1912) reminds viewers of the extent to which musical composition informed certain pictorial experiments during these years (while also registering the explicit embrace of Robert Delaunay's work by the Munich-based Blaue Reiter group formed around Kandinsky). Simultaneity in music substitutes a polyphony of chords instead of a linear succession – the kind of effect pursued in many of the works on display. As art historian Nell Andrew writes in the exhibition catalog, the indissoluble coupling of music and dance proved influential in Orphism's pictorial tendencies (much in the way that figure and ground often prove indistinguishable in Orphic imagery).

The principal ambitions of these painters were optical rather than intellectual. The Delaunays paid close attention to post-Impressionist innovations by Georges Seurat and Paul Signac, as well as the scientific color theories of French chemist Michel Eugène Chevreul. But the "contrasts" out of which they constructed their images were not merely ocular or chromatic. Orphic imagery responded affectively to the conditions of modern life in the metropolis and its

Marc Chagall: *Homage to Apollinaire*, 1913.



Courtesy Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven/©2024 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

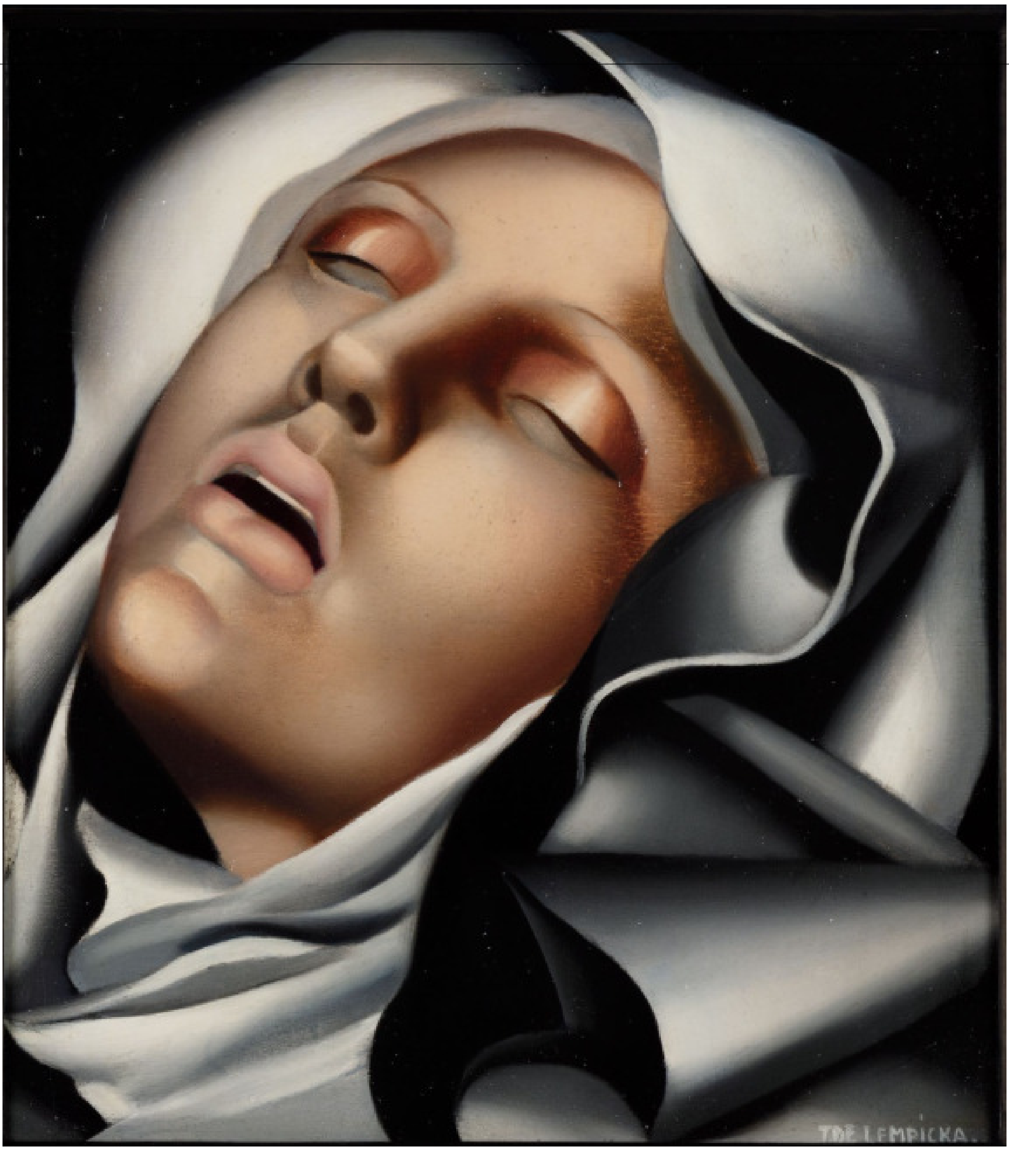
own canvases in turn – stands out in this regard. But as the exhibition progresses, some juxtapositions lose their punch, as well as the larger argument about Orphism's precise significance and resonance. Poignant clusters of works become diluted by a series of rather oblique inclusions. The presence of early Cubist works by Marcel Duchamp makes sense, given his affiliation with Picabia. By contrast, paintings by Jean Metzinger, Marsden Hartley, David Bomberg, Natalia Goncharova, and the sculpture of Alexander Archipenko prove confusing in their inclusion, and the same can be said of the Futurist works by Giacomo Balla and Gino Severini. Vorticist, Rayonist, Cubist, and Futurist painting all evince some shared elements with Orphic abstraction, but the inclusion of works from various movements might leave the uninitiated visitor in doubt as to Orphism's precise content, contours, or consequence.

About the work of Archipenko, Apollinaire proclaimed that the artist sought "above all the purity of forms," attaining not simply a melody but "a harmony." The same might be said of all the artists in this show. Yet in placing so many tendencies under the aegis of Orphism, the exhibition erases its actual edges, such as they were, as it attempts to define them. This may aim to reflect the malleability of the designation itself, but it also risks rendering Orphism a bit of everything – and, hence, nothing in particular.

The show's extending the Orphic enterprise into the 1930s results in a similar slackness. Aside from a few sparse reprisals by Delaunay and Kupka between the two world wars in Europe, Orphism essentially petered out by 1914, even as its innovations resonated in other experiments. Paintings by the American Synchromist painters Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell made between 1913 and 1917 receive their due, and Thomas Hart Benton's *Bubbles* (1914–17) reveals the temptations of nonobjective painting even for the most unlikely artists by the mid-1910s. The arresting, electric blue of a work by Mainie Jellett (1938) certainly corresponds with the nearby *Painting for Contemplation* by the Cubist Albert Gleizes (1942). But focusing on purely formal (and belated) resonances hardly helps elucidate an already loose and fugitive movement.

In spite of such shortcomings, the show assembles an impressive spectrum of works, and sets into entrancing relief the confluence of nonobjective artists in Paris on the eve of the First World War. Even when its juxtapositions appear strained, various individual paintings gain new light – and hue – in this exhibition's vibrant polyphony. ●

– Ara H. Merjian



Tamara de Lempicka: *Sainte Thérèse d'Avila*, 1930.

Courtesy Museo Soumaya, Mexico City/©2024 Tamara de Lempicka Estate, LLC/ADAGP, Paris/ARS, New York

SAN FRANCISCO

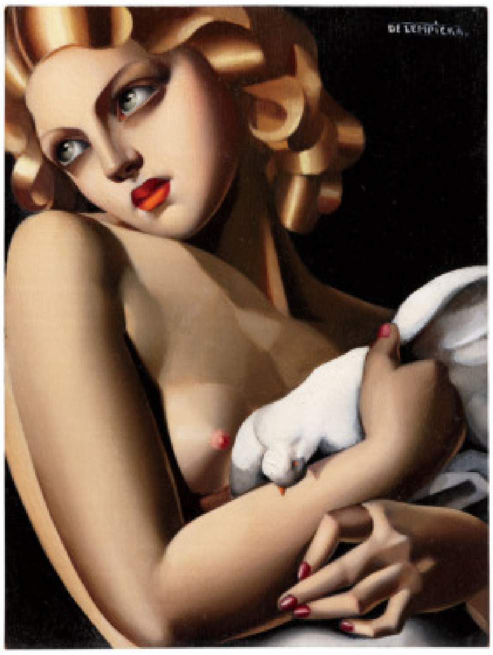
Tamara de Lempicka

de Young Museum
Through February 9, 2025

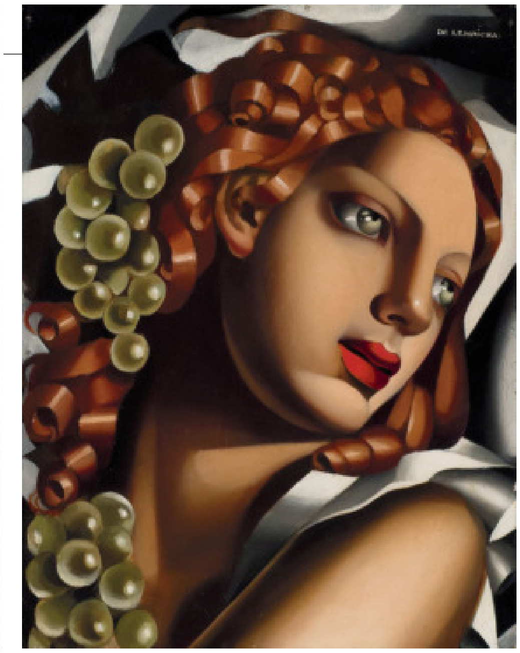
Next stop: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Why are the Art Deco painter's seductive, sober views of the Roaring Twenties so resonant today?

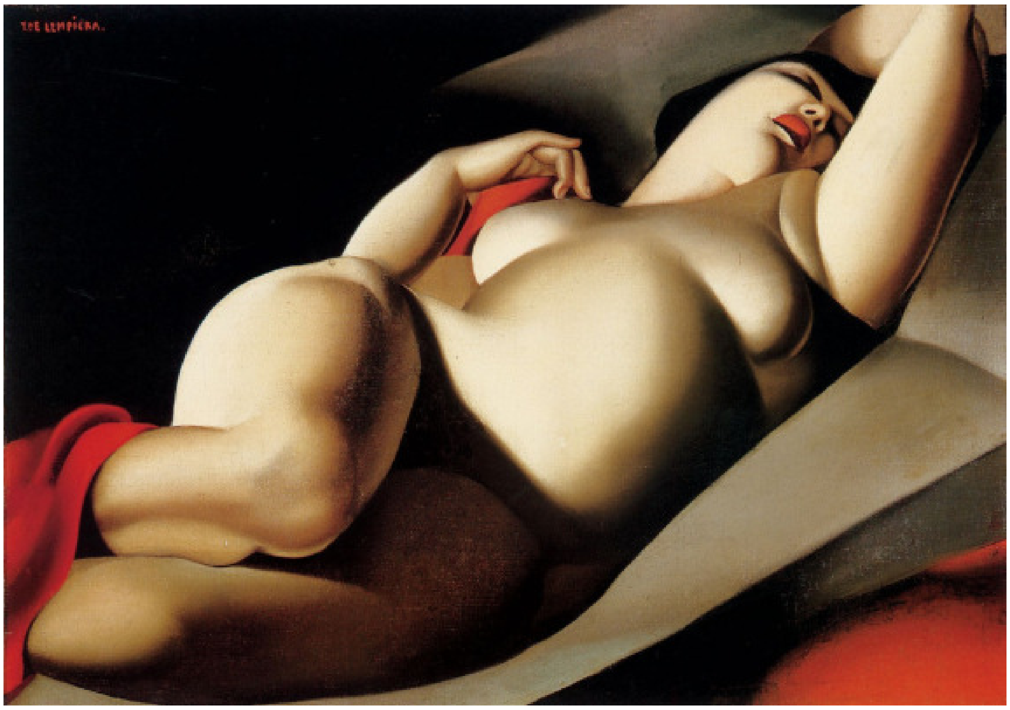
In some of her later still lifes, Tamara de Lempicka signed her name on a trompe l'oeil scrap of paper, small slips whose curled edges seem to peel away from the painting's surface. A common trope in Golden Age Dutch vanitas scenes, the convention at once indicates Lempicka's affinity with the history of painting and serves as a reminder that the artist wore her identity lightly. Although new research reveals she was born Tamara Rosa Hurwitz-Gorska in 1894, Lempicka identified variously as Monsieur Lempitzky, Tamara de Lempicka, and Baroness Kuffner, changing it up as her career and social status shifted. This adaptability first anonymized her femaleness and later foregrounded her rising rank once she married a baron. More than changing her name, her willingness to adapt to suit the times was crucial to Lempicka's survival and success in a



Lempicka: *Woman with Dove*, 1929–30.



Lempicka: *Brilliance (Bacchante)*, ca. 1932.



Lempicka: *The Beautiful Rafaëla*, 1927.

©2024 Tamara de Lempicka Estate, LLC/ADAGP, Paris/ARS, New York (3); Clockwise from top left: Courtesy Artis—Naples, The Baker Museum Collection; Courtesy Weinstein Gallery, San Francisco; Collection Tim Rice

period of dramatic historical shifts, especially at the height of her career in the *années folles* of 1920s Paris.

Lempicka's personal life is at the forefront of the revived and booming interest in her work, which includes a feature-length documentary (*The True Story of Tamara de Lempicka & the Art of Survival*), a Broadway musical (*Lempicka*), and the artist's first major museum retrospective in the United States, open now at San Francisco's de Young museum, and traveling to Houston in the spring.

The exhibition opens with a photograph of the artist herself, the picture of glamour in a dark lip, roller-set curls, and tilted beret. Lempicka's biography provides plenty of fodder for intrigue. She helped her first husband escape Russian imprisonment in the wake of the 1917 Revolution; fled St. Petersburg for Paris and later, Hollywood; and painted seductive images of lovers both male and female.

Lempicka studied drawing in the studio of André Lhote where, after some early forays into Cubism and abstraction, she developed a clarity of line and voluptuous attention to the nude figure. She declared herself the painter of Art Deco, and that movement's shimmering surface effects accord with both her personality and style. As a portraitist, Lempicka employed a high-contrast technique that transformed her sitters into sculptural objects – or transformed sculpture into paint, as in a 1930 study of Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*. Her work, cool and tonal, lent itself well to reproduction, and it appeared regularly on the cover of the German magazine *Die Dame*. An icon of Europe's "new woman," *Die Dame* was aimed at stylish and independent figures like Lempicka herself; the magazine too was recently and briefly revived by art collector and publisher Christian Boros.

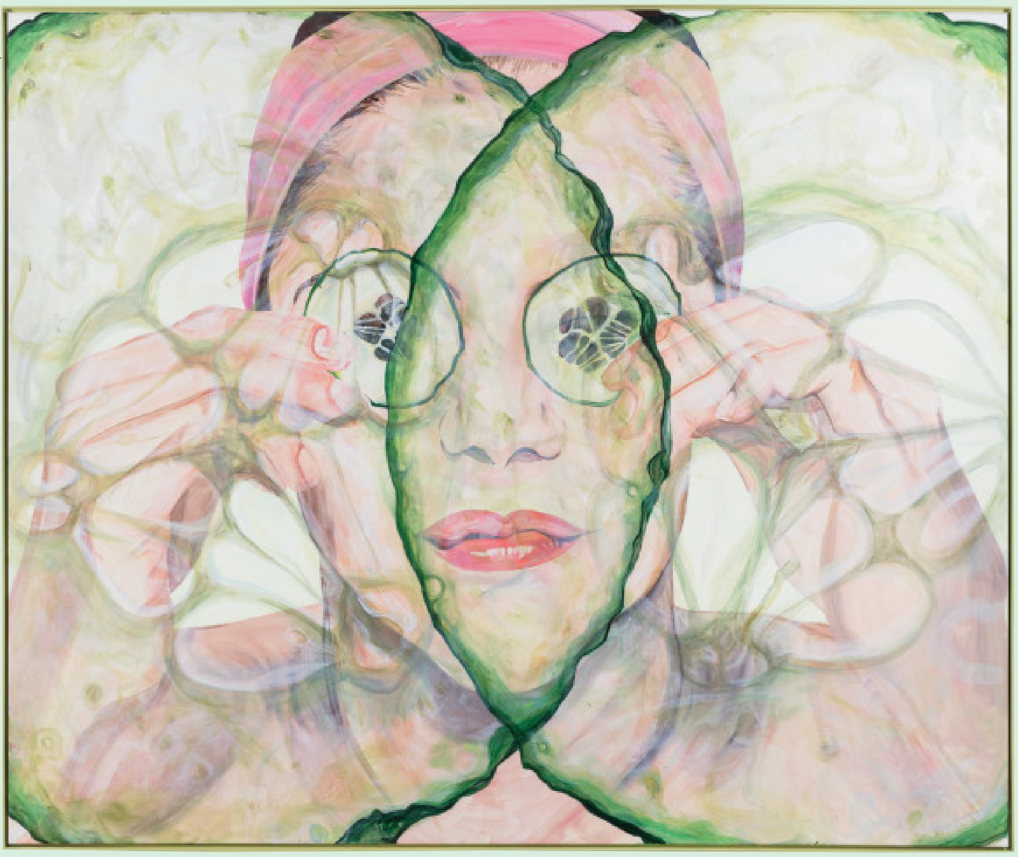
Why Lempicka now? The recent documentary suggests the show is part of an ongoing reckoning in the museum world with the limitations of a largely white, male canon of art history. Lempicka offers a compelling female heroine, one who painted strong women existing beyond the male gaze. Yet there are more specific ways Lempicka sheds light on our present moment. In the early days of the Covid pandemic, before it became clear how long it might last and how badly it would exacerbate systemic injustices, there was a sense that the world might emerge into another Roaring Twenties, a period of release and collective celebration. On one level, Lempicka's work shows us what this could have looked like: soaring skyscrapers, slinky dresses, fast cars, free love.

The 1920s, of course, were not all that great, and they were certainly not great for everyone – not least for Lempicka, who despite all the apparent glamour and success was faced with a failing marriage, struggling to raise a child without being saddled with the career-stifling label "mother," and doing both with the threat of fascism looming in Europe. For a 1928 painting, she cloaked her daughter, Kizette, in a billowing white Communion gown, a guise intended to conceal her Jewish lineage that suggests Lempicka was well aware of the need to dissimulate her origins, given the political climate. In 1929 she set sail for America, arriving, in her telling, at the very moment the stock market crashed, losing much of her wealth in the process.

The duplicity of the times is there in her paintings, in the hard-edged shadows and the way the body becomes a machine, with conical breasts and curls like carved metal. Even her most sensuous works feature all polished, impenetrable surfaces, as in *The Beautiful Rafaëla* (1927), absent body hair or a navel. The hardened figures who inhabit Lempicka's canvases seem to embody lines taken from her lover Ira Perrot's poetry: "White, black, gray is their kingdom of stone / their reign is the reign of hard minerals / their soul colder than cold stone / the icy gaze of their opal eyes." Words for survival in another Twenties tinged with darkness. ●

– Kelly Presutti

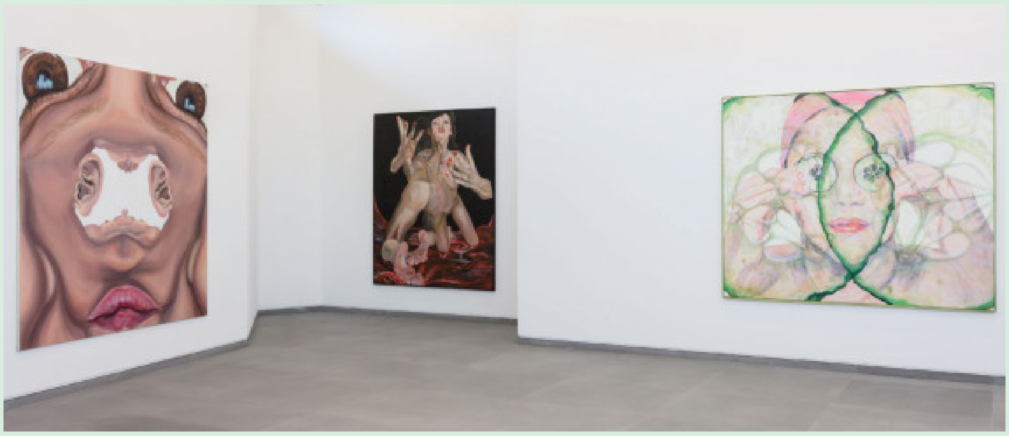
COVER ARTIST



Jana Euler: *Filled (health / beauty enhancer)*, 2016.

Gherkin-Goggled Girl

Jana Euler's *Filled (health / beauty enhancer)* asks if a trip to the spa can fill the void.



View of Jana Euler's 2017 solo exhibition at Cabinet Gallery, London.

When Jana Euler debuted her 2016 painting *Filled (health / beauty enhancer)* at Cabinet Gallery in London, it was one of four renderings of "empty" faces, as she called them in a text she wrote for the show. These blank visages – eyes eclipsed by cucumbers, a vacant smiley face, and two watch faces hollowed out – simultaneously evoke things one might enlist to try to fill the proverbial void. In *Filled (religion)*, 2016, a fancy wristwatch standing in for luxury is painted as if prolapsed, its upside-down numbers radiating out from the circumference and spilling off the canvas, its straps extending into the watch's emptied center, looking like a receding highway.

Another painting in the show titled with two quotation marks surrounding a void – „ " (2016) – caricatures the experience of trying to view your own body in total. We see every part of a brown-eyed woman – her nose big and blurry from up close, her feet far away – as if peering through her nostril as she looks up. Front and rear views frame a central void, offering completion without coherence.

As for our gherkin-goggled cover girl, this white woman at the spa – that quintessential image of wellness – is seen through two green circles that overlap like a Venn diagram, converging as things do when held close to your face. Covering the whole painting, they serve as a sort of membrane, and belong, it is implied, over the eyes of the viewer.

Filled (health / beauty enhancer) is easily Euler's least ugly painting. As Rachel Wetzler described in this magazine in 2020, Euler's works tend toward "the viscerally off-putting, grating, or garish," in ways that often "itch." Indeed, images of luxury wellness can be grating, not least for the inequities they embody. It is also worth adding that for Euler, who is German, wellness is less of a luxury than it is in the United States. In Germany, health care is a human right, and even saunas are municipal. I've wondered how this colors Euler's perception of such imagery but can't ask, as the artist does not give interviews.

For me, though, looking at this image of wellness today – after the rise of both Goop and the GOP – the translucent cucumbers resonate differently than they did when Euler first painted them. Audre Lorde wrote in an essay that "caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare," a quote too often isolated from her point that a preserved self is better equipped for action, not exempt from it. In times like these, caring for our well-being requires no small amount of maintenance, and it matters that we tend to it, so long as we forgo cucumbers so opaque that we can no longer see whether the world is on fire. Few of us can afford this and, anyway, as Euler so wryly suggests, self-care is not enough to fill the void. ●

– *Emily Watlington*

Courtesy Cabinet, London/dépendance, Brussels/Galerie Neu, Berlin/Greene Naftali, New York (2); Bottom: Photo Mark Blower

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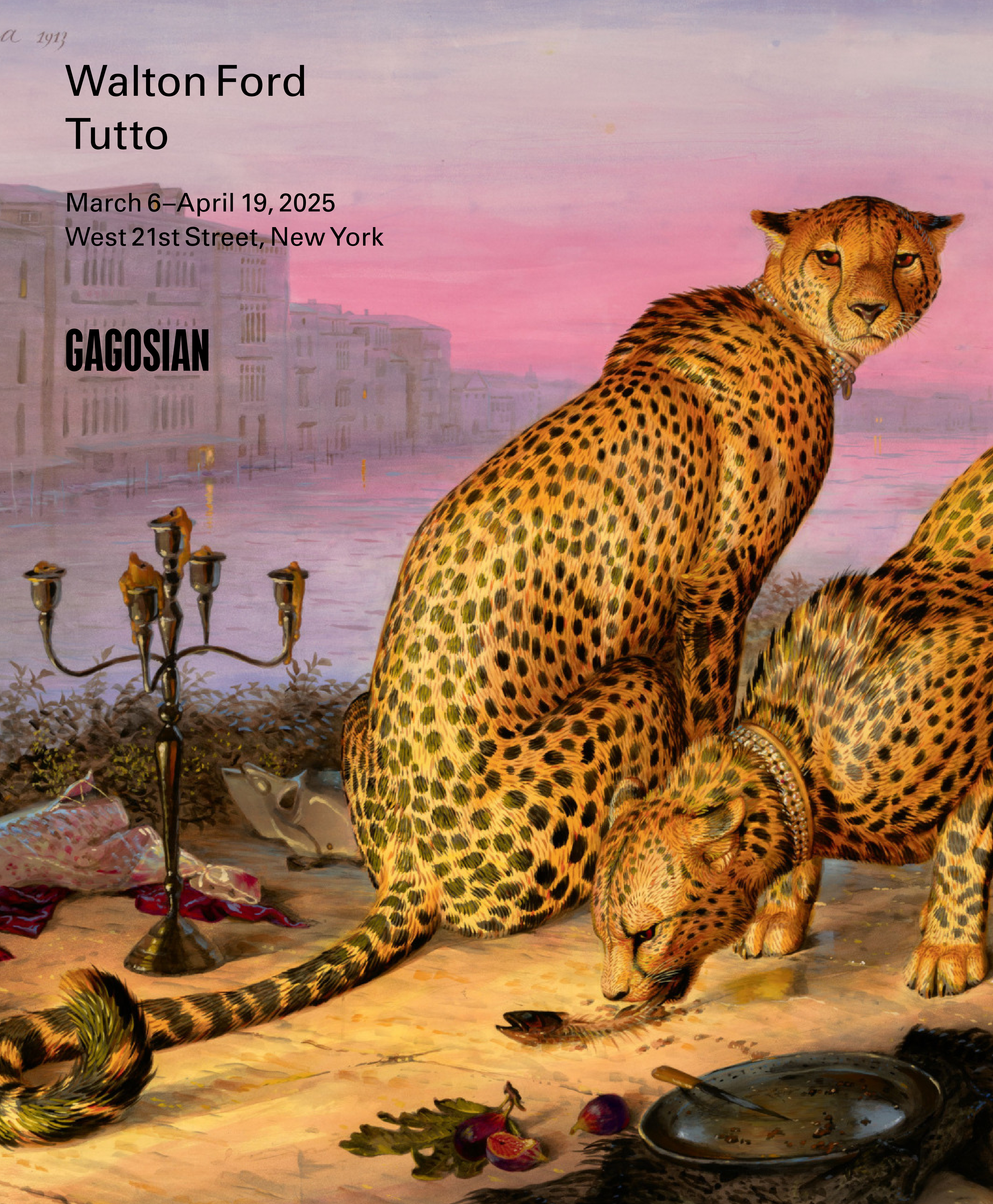

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